

## Vitamin D insufficiency – Patient leaflet

### What is Vitamin D?



Vitamin D forms in the skin when it is exposed to sunlight. It can also be obtained from some foods. We need vitamin D to maintain good health and to keep bones and muscles strong and healthy.

Sunlight is the main source of vitamin D; more than 90% of what we need is supplied this way.

Enjoying the sun safely, while taking care not to burn, can help to provide the benefits of vitamin D without raising the risk of skin cancer. Expose your skin to 20-30 minutes of sunshine before applying any sunscreen.

Small amounts of vitamin D are also obtained from oily fish, egg yolks, mushrooms, fortified breakfast cereals, milk and margarine.

### How can I increase my vitamin D level?

- For **everyone in the general population aged 4 years and older**, and including **pregnant and lactating women**, the recommendation is to take a supplement which provides the equivalent of **400IU** (international units) a day. **400IU is equivalent to 10 micrograms** of colecalciferol (Vitamin D3) or ergocalciferol (Vitamin D2).
- In the UK, individuals in population groups **at increased risk** of vitamin D deficiency are those with minimal sunshine exposure as a result of not spending time outdoors (e.g. frail and institutionalised people) or habitually wearing clothing that covers most of the skin while outdoors and those from minority ethnic groups with dark skin.
- **All infants and young children** should take a daily supplement containing Vitamin D: **340 - 400 IU (8.5 -10 micrograms) for infants from birth to 1 year old** (including exclusively breast fed and partially breast fed infants, from birth); **400IU (10 micrograms)** for children aged 4 years and upwards.
- Infants who are fed infant formula will not need vitamin drops until they are receiving less than 500ml of infant formula a day, as these products are fortified with vitamin D.

**Vitamin D can be bought over the counter** or on-line from pharmacies, health shops and supermarkets in the form of **Colecalciferol (preferred) or Ergocalciferol**. There are many brands and “own brands” available. Examples of brand names include SunvitD3, ProD3.

Some products contain doses suitable to be taken on a **daily basis** but others contain larger doses of colecalciferol which are intended to be taken on a **weekly or monthly basis**, not every day. Make sure you know how often to take your vitamin supplement.

### “Healthy Start”

“Healthy Start” vitamins products contain the recommended amount of vitamin D and some other important vitamins. **They are free of charge to those who are eligible.**

### Where do I get Healthy Start vitamins?

For further information about Healthy Start, speak to your midwife, family nurse, health visitor or visit [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)

For further information on vitamin D go to the patient UK website: [www.patient.co.uk/health/Vitamin-D-Deficiency.htm](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Vitamin-D-Deficiency.htm)