

Learning About Vitamin D



Why is it important to get enough vitamin D?

Your body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium. Calcium keeps your bones and muscles, including your heart, healthy and strong. If your muscles don't get enough calcium, they can cramp, hurt, or feel weak. You may have long-term (chronic) muscle aches and pains.

If you don't get enough vitamin D throughout life, you have an increased chance of having thin and brittle bones (osteoporosis) in your later years. Children who don't get enough vitamin D may not grow as much as others their age. They also have a chance of getting a rare disease called rickets. It causes weak bones.

Vitamin D and calcium are added to many foods. And your body uses sunshine to make its own vitamin D.

How much vitamin D do you need?

The Institute of Medicine recommends that people ages 1 through 70 get 600 IU (international units) every day. Adults 71 and older need 800 IU every day.

Blood tests for vitamin D can check your vitamin D level. But there is no standard normal range used by all laboratories. You're likely getting enough vitamin D if your levels are in the range of 20 to 50 ng/mL.

How can you get more vitamin D?

Foods that contain vitamin D include:

- Salmon, tuna, and mackerel. These are some of the best foods to eat when you need to get more vitamin D.
- Cheese, egg yolks, and beef liver. These foods have vitamin D in small amounts.
- Milk, soy drinks, orange juice, yogurt, margarine, and some kinds of cereal have vitamin D added to them.

Some people don't make vitamin D as well as others. They may have to take extra care in getting enough vitamin D.

Things that reduce how much vitamin D your body makes include:

- Dark skin, such as many African Americans have.
- Age, especially if you are older than 65.
- Digestive problems, such as Crohn's or celiac disease.
- Liver and kidney disease.

Some people who do not get enough vitamin D may need supplements.

Are there any risks from taking vitamin D?

- Too much vitamin D:
 - Can damage your kidneys.
 - Can cause nausea and vomiting, constipation, and weakness.
 - Raises the amount of calcium in your blood. If this happens, you can get confused or have an irregular heart rhythm.
- Vitamin D may interact with other medicines. Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you take, including over-the-counter drugs, herbs, and pills. Tell your doctor about all of your current medical problems.

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