

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is needed to control calcium levels in the body. Most calcium in our bodies is found in the bones. Calcium does not affect vitamin D absorption.

In children, a lack of Vitamin D causes rickets. The main signs are deformed bones which cause pain, tenderness and muscle weakness. Children with rickets grow slowly, can become anaemic and get lung infections. They may also get tooth decay. There have been reports of rickets in Asian children living in the UK.

In adults, a lack of Vitamin D causes osteomalacia – causing muscle weakness and bone tenderness or pain in the spine, shoulder, ribs or pelvis.

Most people receive Vitamin D from sunshine on exposed skin. Many Asians living in the UK do not expose their skin to the sunlight or do not spend long enough in the sunshine to have an effect. Vegetarian Asians seem to need more vitamin D levels, compared with Caucasians and non-vegetarian Asians.

During the summer months aim to expose at least your face and arms to the sunshine for 20 – 30 minutes a day – just enough to see a small darkening in skin colour, but no sign of sunburn or reddening. Too much sunshine can damage your skin. In the winter you will need to spend longer outside or sit by an open window. Glass prevents sunshine making vitamin D in your skin.

If you do not get vitamin D from sunshine, you need to get it from food. Good sources of vitamin D are only found in animal food (e.g. liver, oily fish, egg yolk, liver), but some foods are fortified such as margarine, Soya milk and breakfast cereals.



The following people should take a supplement of Vitamin D while in the UK.

- People who rarely go out of doors or wear clothes that completely conceal them
- Babies, young children and pregnant women from Asian communities
- Older people who eat no meat or fish or who are housebound.
- Asians Vegetarian

Stop taking the supplement when you are in a sunny country.

