

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D helps our bodies to absorb calcium and phosphorous from our food. These minerals are needed to keep our bones healthy and strong. Vitamin D is also thought to be important for muscle growth and for general good health.

Where does our natural vitamin D come from?

Vitamin D is mostly made in our skin by exposing it to sunlight. Very little vitamin D comes from the foods we normally eat, although some foods are fortified (enriched) with it.

What happens if I don't get enough vitamin D?

A lack of vitamin D (known as vitamin D deficiency) can cause muscle weakness and painful bones. Children with vitamin D deficiency can experience poor growth, tooth delay and find that their bones start to bend out of shape due to a condition known as Rickets.

A lack of vitamin D can cause a general sense of being unwell, feeling tired, with vague aches and pains.

Vitamin D deficiency is not unusual – research shows that just over 1 in 10 people in Europe have vitamin D levels that are considered to be too low for good bone health. These figures are much higher in winter time.

What causes vitamin D deficiency?

Vitamin D deficiency can happen for a number of reasons:

- Our bodies need an increased level of vitamin D at certain times.
- Our bodies cannot make enough vitamin D.
- We're not getting enough vitamin D from our food.

Who is at risk of vitamin D deficiency?

Some people are more at risk of vitamin D deficiency than others. Those most at risk include:

- older people,
- people with darker skin,
- people who don't get out into the sunlight – for example, people in hospital or nursing homes,
- people who cover up their skin with clothes for cultural reasons.

Other at-risk groups include people who are obese, children and pregnant or breastfeeding women.

If your doctor thinks you might be at risk of developing vitamin D deficiency, you may be asked to take a prescription medicine or a food supplement to prevent that from happening.

If you get side effects from any medicines or supplements please talk to a healthcare professional. This includes any possible side effects not listed on the label. You can also report side effects to HPRA Pharmacovigilance via www.hpra.ie or in the case of medicines provided by Consilient Health via drugsafety@consilienthealth.com.

