

VITAMIN D (A SUNSHINE VITAMIN) - HEALTH BENEFITS AND RIGHT WAY TO TAKE IT.

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Introduction:

Vitamin D, also known as the sunshine vitamin, is produced by the body as a response to sun exposure; it can also be consumed in food or supplements.

Vitamin D is actually not a vitamin. Despite the name, vitamin D is considered a pro-hormone and not actually a vitamin. Vitamins are nutrients that cannot be created by the body and therefore must be taken in through our diet. However, vitamin D can be synthesized by our body when sunlight hits our skin. It is estimated that sensible sun exposure on bare skin for 5-10 minutes 2-3 times per week allows most people to produce sufficient vitamin D, but vitamin D breaks down quite quickly, meaning that stores can run low, especially in winter. Recent studies have suggested that a substantial percentage of the global population is vitamin D deficient.

Having enough vitamin D is important for a number of reasons, including maintaining healthy bones and teeth; it may also protect against a range of conditions such as cancer, type 1 diabetes, and multiple sclerosis.

Vitamin D has multiple roles in the body, it helps to:

- Maintain the health of bones and teeth.
- Support the health of the immune system, brain, and nervous system.
- Regulate insulin levels and aid diabetes management.
- Support lung function and cardiovascular health.
- Influence the expression of genes involved in cancer development.

Health benefits of vitamin D

- **Vitamin D for healthy bones:** Vitamin D plays a substantial role in the regulation of calcium and maintenance of phosphorus levels in the blood, two factors that are extremely

important for maintaining healthy bones. We need vitamin D to absorb calcium in the intestines and to reclaim calcium that would otherwise be excreted through the kidneys.

Vitamin D deficiency in children can cause rickets, a disease characterized by a severely bow-legged appearance due to softening of the bones.

In adults, vitamin D deficiency manifests as osteomalacia (softening of the bones) or osteoporosis. Osteomalacia results in poor bone density and muscular weakness. Osteoporosis is the most common bone disease among post-menopausal women and older men.

- **Reduced risk of diabetes:** Several observational studies have shown an inverse relationship between blood concentrations of vitamin D in the body and risk of type 2 diabetes.
- **Healthy pregnancy:** Pregnant women who are deficient in vitamin D seem to be at greater risk of developing preeclampsia and needing a cesarean section.
- **Cancer prevention:** Vitamin D is extremely important for regulating cell growth and for cell-to-cell communication.

People who are prone for Vitamin D deficiency

Although the body can create vitamin D, there are many reasons deficiency can occur. For instance, darker skin color and the use of sunscreen reduce the body's ability to absorb the ultraviolet radiation B (UVB) rays from the sun needed to produce vitamin D. A sunscreen with sun protection factor (SPF) 30 can reduce the body's ability to synthesize the vitamin by 95 percent. To start vitamin D production, the skin has to be directly exposed to sunlight, not covered by clothing. People, who live in northern latitudes or areas of high pollution, work at night and stay home during the day, or are homebound should aim to consume extra vitamin D from food sources whenever possible. Infants who are exclusively breast-fed need a vitamin D supplement, especially if they are dark-skinned or have minimal sun exposure.

Symptoms of vitamin D deficiency:

There are many alarm symptoms indicating deficiency status of Vitamin D including recurrent infections, allergies, Fatigue, Painful bones and back, Depressed mood, Impaired wound healing, Hair loss, Muscle pain, osteoporosis, neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease. Vitamin D deficiency may also contribute to the development of lifestyle diseases like diabetes, hypertension, certain cancers, especially breast, prostate, and colon cancers.

Vitamin D food sources

Sunlight is the most common and efficient source of vitamin D. The richest food sources of vitamin D are fish oil and fatty fish. Cod liver oil 1 tablespoon, raw mushrooms 1 cup, salmon, canned, fortified skim milk, 1 cup, tuna, canned in water, drained, egg, chicken etc are the richest source of vitamin D.

Right way to take Vitamin D:

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble Vitamin and can only be absorbed in the presence of fat in our gut. If you have gone to your doctor for a checkup in the last year, chances are you have undergone vitamin D deficiency test and taken supplements to correct your levels.

Taking a Vitamin D supplement is no rocket science. You need to take one tablet, once a week and you are done! But are you taking your supplements correctly? Being a fat-soluble vitamin, Vitamin D requires fat to be absorbed by our body in absence of which, there is an incomplete absorption. So, what are the correct ways of taking Vitamin D supplements? Let's find out.

- **With the largest meal of the day:** According to a study, if you take Vitamin D with the largest meal of the day, there is a 50% increase of vitamin D levels in your blood. This is because your largest meal of the day contains the most amounts of fats helping in the absorption of the vitamin.

- **With Milk:** If not with the largest meal of the day, you can take your Vitamin D supplements with milk. It also contains magnesium which promotes the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins. **Vitamin D supplements** should not be taken on an empty stomach or in between the meals like most medicines.

To get an optimum absorption it's important to take these supplements **co rrectly**

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