



Vitamin D for you and your baby

Vitamin D helps to maintain your muscle and bone strength and helps your body to absorb calcium from food. In pregnancy, vitamin D also helps to develop your baby's bones.

If you have a vitamin D deficiency it can affect the amount of calcium your baby has in their bones. In severe deficiency this can cause a bone deformity called rickets.

How do you get vitamin D?

From the sun

Most of our vitamin D is made in our skin by the sun's ultraviolet rays.

It is important to get enough sunlight to produce vitamin D without increasing your risk of skin cancer. In summer, spring, and autumn, you only need a few minutes of sun exposure each day to help maintain healthy vitamin D levels.

In winter, when UV levels are low (typically from May to September in Victoria), try to get active outdoors in the middle of the day with some skin exposed.

People with darker skin need more sunlight and those with very black skin may need three to six times as much sunlight as fair skinned people.

From food

Vitamin D is present in a small number of foods, mainly oily fish such as mackerel and sardines, and eggs. In Australia, small amounts are added to margarine and some brands of milk. For the average person, food will supply about 10 percent of the vitamin D they need.

Although liver and cod liver oil contain vitamin D, we do not recommend them in

pregnancy as they also contain too much vitamin A for someone who is pregnant.

About vitamin D supplements

In pregnancy

In most cases, we recommend a vitamin D supplement of at least 400 International Units (IU) per day is taken throughout pregnancy.

You may already be taking a pregnancy multivitamin which includes vitamin D however, the vitamin D content varies between brands. Check the label to see if you need extra supplementation.

You can purchase vitamin D supplements without a prescription. Most brands contain 1000 IU vitamin D per dose. This is more than the minimum amount recommended and is safe to take during pregnancy. Talk with your pharmacist about a suitable supplement for your needs.

You are at risk of vitamin D deficiency if you have naturally very dark skin or too little sunlight exposure. This may happen if you spend a lot of time indoors or cover most of your skin with clothing. If your pregnancy care team believe your vitamin D levels may be low, they will request a blood test early in your pregnancy. If your levels are too low, your doctor or midwife will prescribe a vitamin D supplement. The amount of supplement you need may change throughout your pregnancy, depending on what your blood level is. You may need a higher dose at first to build your level up.

There is no danger of overdose with these amounts.

For babies

Vitamin D is important for your baby's bones. Breastfeeding is the best way to feed your baby and whilst breastmilk does contain some vitamin D, it may not be enough for your baby. It is still important to breastfeed your baby even if your vitamin D level is low.

Baby formula includes some vitamin D, but it also may not be enough for your baby.

Whether your baby is breastfed or bottle-fed, a supplement of 400 IU daily of vitamin D is recommended for their first twelve months.

Not all vitamin D supplements are suitable for babies. Ask your pharmacist to recommend a vitamin D supplement suitable for your baby.

After your pregnancy

If your vitamin D levels were low during pregnancy, we recommend you continue to take vitamin D supplements. This can help to protect you against problems such as osteoporosis (brittle bones). If you stop taking supplements, have your local doctor (GP) check your levels to see if it has stayed in the normal range.

Need an interpreter?

Please tell the staff if you need an interpreter.



Interpreter

An interpreter will be available on the day of your admission.

Related information

Vitamin D supplements for babies

For more information

Women's Welcome Centre (Victoria only)

The Royal Women's Hospital
Monday to Friday - 9.00am to 5.00pm
T: (03) 8345 3037
T: 1800 442 007 (rural callers)

Eat for Health

See the Australian Dietary Guidelines website for advice and resources about healthy eating

W: www.eatforhealth.gov.au

Visit the Women's website

For more information and fact sheets on nutrition and pregnancy visit thewomens.org.au or scan this QR code

