Vitamin D

What Does Vitamin D Do?

Vitamin D is important to bone health. It helps your body absorb calcium, which helps build healthy bones.

Low levels of vitamin D in the body may increase the risk of:

- Breast, colon, and prostate cancers
- Depressed moods, poor brain function, and more severe dementia in older adults
- Tuberculosis and pneumonia
- Bacterial infections and gum disease
- Autoimmune diseases, such as multiple sclerosis and type 1 diabetes

How Do You Get Vitamin D?

You can get vitamin D from many foods. Also, when exposed to sunlight, your body makes some vitamin D.

Sun exposure does not usually supply enough vitamin D to meet your body's needs. Sunscreen protects you from harmful UV rays, but it also limits the vitamin D your body can produce from sun exposure.

How Much Vitamin D Do You Need?

The amount of vitamin D that you need each day changes as you age. The following recommendations are for healthy individuals. They assume that a person will not make vitamin D through sun exposure.

- Ages 50 years or younger: 200 international units (IU) vitamin D per day
- Ages 51–70 years: 400 IU vitamin D per day
- Older than 70 years: 600 IU vitamin D per day.

People who take the following medications may need more vitamin D:

- Corticosteroid medications, such as prednisone
- Orlistat (brand names Xenical and Alli)
- Cholestyramine (brand names Questran, LoCholest, and Prevalite)
- Seizure medications, such as phenobarbital and dilantin

Tips for Getting More Vitamin D

- Have several servings of milk every day.
  - All types of milk—nonfat, 2%, and whole milk—are fortified with Vitamin D.
  - The words "Vitamin D" often appear in large letters on whole milk containers. However, whole milk does not have more vitamin D than other types of milk.
- If you drink soymilk, rice milk, or another non-dairy milk, check the food label. Choose types fortified with vitamin D.
- Look for products, such as some juices, that are fortified with calcium and vitamin D.
- Aim to eat fish twice a week.
- Choose yogurt that is vitamin D–fortified.

How Much Vitamin D Is Too Much?

Too much vitamin D can lead to elevated calcium levels. This increases the risk of kidney stones and may weaken bones and muscles.

To avoid these potential health problems, do not get more than 2,000 IU of vitamin D per day from food and supplements.

Which Foods Have Vitamin D?

Vitamin D is found naturally in fish oil, fish, organ meats, and eggs. However, people typically get most of their vitamin D from foods that are fortified with the vitamin, such as milk and cereal.

Foods with Naturally Occurring Vitamin D

Food	Serving Size	Vitamin D (IU)
Herring	3 ounces	1,384
Cod liver oil	1 tablespoon	1,350
Halibut	3 ounces	510
Catfish	3 ounces	425
Salmon, canned	3 ounces	390
Mackerel	3 ounces	306
Sardines, canned	1.75 ounces	250
Tuna, canned	3 ounces	200
Egg yolk	1 yolk	20
Beef liver	3 ounces	15
Swiss cheese	1 ounces	12

Vitamin D–Fortified Foods

Food	Serving Size	Vitamin D (IU)
Soymilk	1 cup	119
Milk	1 cup	100
Fortified orange juice	1 cup	100
Fortified breakfast cereal	1 cup	20–100
Fortified yogurt	1 cup	80
Fortified margarine	1 tablespoon	60