

**Vitamin D**

**What is vitamin D?**

Vitamin D is known as the “sunshine vitamin.” Your body can make it when your skin is exposed to the sun. Your ability to make vitamin D from sunshine depends on your skin color, how far north you live, and season of the year. Too much sunshine can also be bad and put you at risk for skin cancer. Talk to your doctor to decide the right amount of sun for you.

**Why is vitamin D important?**

The main role of vitamin D is to help build and maintain strong, healthy bones and teeth. It helps you absorb calcium and keep the right amount of calcium and phosphorus in the blood. People who do not get enough vitamin D may get brittle, thin bones. This can lead to bone diseases. It may also help with immune function and reduce inflammation.

**Where can I find food sources of vitamin D?**

Few foods are good sources of vitamin D.

- Egg yolks, beef liver, and oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, and canned sardines and tuna, as well as fish oils.
- Foods with added vitamin D provide most of our vitamin D in our diet. This includes milk, soy and almond milk, orange juices, yogurts, margarines, and breakfast cereals.
- Ice cream, cheese, and cottage cheese may not have added vitamin D.
- Vitamin D needs fat to be absorbed.

**How much vitamin D do I need?**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Vitamin D IU (International Units) and micrograms (mcg)</b>
Birth – 12 months	400 (10 mcg)
1-18 years	600 (15 mcg)
19- 50 years	600 (15 mcg)
51-70 years	600 (15 mcg)
≥ 70 years	800 (20 mcg)

Note: 40 IU = 1 mcg

Although these are the current guidelines for vitamin D, many people may need more. This is true for people with increased risk of vitamin D deficiency.

**How do I know if I am getting enough vitamin D?**

Some people are at higher risk for vitamin D deficiency. Talk to your healthcare team to find out if you are getting enough vitamin D. Those who are at increased risk of deficiency are:

- Infants who are breastfed
- People over age 50
- People who do not get much sun
- People with dark skin
- People who live in the northern half of the US (includes Midwest)
- People who do not absorb fats well (Cystic fibrosis, Crohn’s disease, celiac disease)
- People who are obese or had gastric bypass surgery

## Medicine Interactions

These medicines increase your risk of having a low vitamin D level:

- Medicine that suppresses the immune system (prednisone and other steroids)
- Medicine that lowers cholesterol like cholestyramine (Questran, LoCholest, Prevalite)
- Some seizure medicines (phenytoin (Dilantin) and phenobarbital)
- Some weight-loss medicines like orlistat (Xenical, Alli).

Please talk to your health care team about your vitamin D needs if you are taking one of these medicines.

## Can I get too much vitamin D?

You can get too much vitamin D from supplements. Symptoms may include

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Weight loss
- Weakness
- Poor appetite
- Constipation

The current safe levels for vitamin D supplements are:

- 1000 IU (25 mcg) for 0-6 months
- 1500 IU (38 mcg) for 6-12 months
- 2500 IU (63 mcg) for 1-3 years
- 3000 IU (75 mcg) for 4-8 years
- 4000 IU (100 mcg) for anyone 9 years and older

In some cases, your doctor may suggest doses greater than those listed here.

Getting too much sun won't cause you to get too much vitamin D because the body limits how much it creates. But getting too much sun can put you at risk for skin cancer.

## Where and when should I get my vitamin D level checked?

You can get vitamin D levels checked with a simple blood test. Ask your health care team if you should have this blood test.

## Supplements

Supplements come in liquid, chewable, gummy, tablets and soft gels. You can find them over the counter. Talk to your health care team to decide the right one.

## Label Changes

Labels have changed from using international units (IU) to micrograms (mcg) to list how much vitamin D there is. This change can make it hard to figure out which one to take. Many labels include both mcg and IU. Ask your pharmacist or health care team if you have any questions about this.

**\*\*Be sure to choose one with “cholecalciferol” as the vitamin D source. Make sure it also has the USP seal on the label.**

**\*\*Do not begin taking high doses of vitamin D without first talking to your doctor.**

## **Teach Back**

What is the most important thing you learned from this handout?

What changes will you make in your diet/lifestyle, based on what you learned today?

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below. You can also visit our website at [www.uwhealth.org/nutrition](http://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition).

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at: **(608) 287-2770**.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#487