

**This leaflet explains why Vitamin D is recommended to anyone who is pregnant and/or breastfeeding.**

## Introduction

The current UK advice recommends Vitamin D supplementation to everyone especially if you are of Black, Asian and minority backgrounds. Vitamin D is extremely important for keeping teeth and bones healthy, helping your nerves and muscles to work properly and maintaining a healthy immune system.



## Why is Vitamin D important?

A lack of vitamin D can lead to bone deformities such as rickets (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rickets-and-osteomalacia/>) in children, and bone pain caused by a condition called osteomalacia (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rickets-and-osteomalacia/>) in adults.

Vitamin D deficiency is also associated with Acute Respiratory Distress (ARDS).

Anyone who is pregnant and/or breastfeeding is advised to take a daily dose of 10 micrograms (400IU) of vitamin D3.

## How do we get Vitamin D?

Most of the vitamin D our body needs is made by the action of sunlight on the skin. Very little is available through the diet as only some foods contain vitamin D and these would need to be eaten in large quantities to meet daily requirements. Foods which are high in vitamin D include: oily fish (i.e. mackerel, sardines, pilchards, trout, salmon, herrings, kippers, eel and whitebait), eggs, fortified breakfast cereals, mushrooms, evaporated milk, dried milk powder and fortified margarine.

If you are able to, spend 15-20 minutes in the sunlight between 11am-3pm, without sunscreen and with some skin exposed, daily. Those with darker skin may need a little more time in the sun. It is important to not let the skin redden or burn.

## Who might have low levels of Vitamin D?

Some groups of people who:

- Are not often outdoors, such as those who are frail or housebound
- Usually wear clothes that cover up most of their skin when outdoors.
- Are from minority ethnic groups with dark skin, such as those of African, African-Caribbean or South Asian origin, might not get enough vitamin D from sunlight
- Are pregnant or breastfeeding to ensure optimum bone health during this important time
- Are vegans and those who do not eat fish or generally have a poor diet
- Are obese (BMI>30kg/m<sup>2</sup>)

- Have had a gastric bypass
- Have malabsorption syndromes or taking certain drugs (antiresorptives, anticonvulsants, rifampicin)
- Have a family history of vitamin D deficiency

### Where can I get Vitamin D?

In Reading, Healthy Start vitamins for women (containing folic acid, vitamin C and vitamin D) are given free to all pregnant women. For more information, speak to your midwife or visit: <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/getting-vitamins/>

Your GP will prescribe a dose of vitamin D only if you are Vitamin D deficient. After this you should purchase your own vitamin D supplements to take daily.

### Where can I get more information?

If you need any further information, please speak with your midwife or visit:

- Your local pharmacist
- NHS Website – <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>
- Patient UK – <https://patient.info/bones-joints-muscles/osteoporosis-leaflet/vitamin-d-deficiency>

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

### References

- [Statement on Vitamin D supplementation for Breastfed Babies UNICEF Jan 2017](#)
- [Vitamin D: supplement use in specific population groups –Nov 2014 and reviewed Aug 2017 \(NICE PH56\)](#)
- NHS Website: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/vitamins-for-children.aspx>

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**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Aneta Hlophe, Senior Midwife, 13 April 2021

Reviewed: November 2023

Next review due: November 2025

#### Our Maternity Strategy and Vision

*'Working together with women, birthing people and families to offer compassionate, supportive care and informed choice; striving for equity and excellence in our maternity service.'*

You can read our maternity strategy here



Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent