



# ESSENTIAL NUTRITION:

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ENSURE YOU'RE GETTING  
ENOUGH VITAMIN D

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You probably know that vitamin D is important for strong bones, but new research shows that it packs many additional health benefits as well. Even though our bodies make this nutrient naturally when we're exposed to sunlight, more than one billion people worldwide suffer from a deficiency.

These are the basic facts about vitamin D and easy ways to ensure you're getting enough.

## Basic Facts About Vitamin D

1. Understand how vitamin D strengthens your bones. Vitamin D is also a hormone. It controls calcium absorption and builds strong bones and teeth while reducing your risk of osteoporosis.
2. Protect your physical health. Studies are discovering more good stuff about the sunshine vitamin. It can also help protect you from certain cancers, heart disease, asthma, type 1 and type 2 diabetes and hypertension.
3. Learn about the mental health benefits. Vitamin D may also help you to think and feel better. In older adults, it's been found effective in improving cognitive functions and alleviating depression.
4. Recognize the risk factors for vitamin D deficiency. As we age, our kidneys have to work harder to convert vitamin D into its active form, so we may need supplements. The same is often true for mothers breastfeeding infants, people with darker skin, and those with conditions like Chron's disease or milk allergies.
5. Know your individual needs. The Institute of Medicine bases their recommendations on age, so they suggest at least 400 IU from birth to 12 months, 600 IU for children and adults, and 800 IU for seniors over 71. Depending on their age and medical condition, some individuals may need 2,000 to 4,000 IUs, which is still regarded as safe.
6. Get tested. While bone pain and muscle weakness are possible, the symptoms of vitamin D deficiency are often very subtle. Your doctor can give you a simple blood test to be sure. It's called a 25 hydroxyvitamin D test and blood levels of 20 nanograms per milliliter are usually considered healthy.
7. Talk with your doctor about drug interactions. Some drugs like steroids can lower vitamin D levels while others like statins can raise them. Your doctor can help you find a safe level for you.

# EASY WAYS TO GET ENOUGH VITAMIN D

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- 1. Be smart about sun exposure.** Our bodies are very efficient at making vitamin D, so keep using your sunscreen to prevent skin cancer and premature aging. ***About 10 minutes a day on your arms may be all you need, especially if you live in a sunny climate.***
- 2. Drink your milk.** Only a few foods contain vitamin D naturally but many are fortified with it. ***Almost all milk in the United States supplies at least 400 IU per quart, which is the main reason why the bone disease rickets has virtually disappeared.***
- 3. Eat more fatty fish.** ***Fish and fish oil are among the most potent sources of vitamin D.*** Three ounces of salmon will cover all your daily needs.
- 4. Add other vitamin D fortified foods to your diet.** More good choices include yogurt, breakfast cereals and orange juice. Check the labels to be sure of what you're getting.
- 5. Maintain a healthy body weight.** Excess fat cells also block the absorption of vitamin D. That's one more good reason to watch your calories and exercise regularly.
- 6. Consider supplements.** Supplements come in two forms. Both D2 and D3 versions are good for you but D3 is the better choice. It's closer to the natural vitamin D your body produces, so the effects are quicker and last longer.

Vitamin D is important for your bones and overall health. Meet your requirements through sensible sun exposure and a healthy diet or talk with your doctor if you think you need supplements.

