

# INFORMATION ON VITAMIN D



This leaflet explains the importance of vitamin D for maintaining good bone health and the changes to the availability of vitamin D supplements for adults on NHS prescription in Croydon.

## YOUR HEALTH PROFESSIONAL ADVISES:-

- A preparation containing 10 micrograms (400 units) of vitamin D
- A preparation containing 20 and 25 micrograms (800 - 1,000 units) of vitamin D
- Healthy Start Vitamin tablets. These are available free to eligible patients from some children's centres. Ask your midwife or health visitor for more information
- Other, please specify .....

## WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ON VITAMIN D?

NHS choices - Vitamins and minerals- Vitamin D  
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/vitamins-minerals/Pages/Vitamin-D.aspx>

Patient.co.uk - Vitamin D Deficiency including Osteomalacia and Rickets  
<http://patient.info/health/vitamin-d-deficiency-including-osteomalacia-and-rickets-leaflet>

National Osteoporosis Society - Healthy bones and risk – Vitamin D  
<https://www.nos.org.uk/healthy-bones-and-risks/Vitamin-D>

This leaflet was prepared by the Medicines Optimisation Team at Croydon CCG in consultation with GPs and representatives from Patient Participation Groups (PPG) from Croydon GP practices.

For enquiries relating to the content of this leaflet please contact the Croydon CCG Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0800 456 1517 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm) or email [SLCSU.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:SLCSU.Complaints@nhs.net)

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## I GET PRESCRIPTIONS FOR VITAMIN D

GP practices in Croydon will no longer routinely prescribe vitamin D supplements. From April 2017, patients currently receiving vitamin D supplements on prescription will be reviewed with a view to stopping this routine provision on the NHS.

There will be situations where prescriptions for vitamin D will be provided. These include:

- If your vitamin D levels are found to be significantly low, (i.e. **Vitamin D deficiency**).
- If you have **Vitamin D insufficiency** (level below the ideal) **PLUS** other risk factors or conditions that affect your bone health.

In both of the above situations you will be offered a prescription for a treatment course of high dose vitamin D (usually 4-8 weeks) to replenish your vitamin D levels.

Once the treatment course is completed, you will be advised to buy low dose vitamin D supplements, long-term to prevent future episodes of deficiency.

## VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY RISK GROUPS

Some people are at greater risk of vitamin D deficiency than others. This may be because their bodies need more vitamin D, they cannot produce enough through their skin, their diet is low in vitamin D, or a combination of all of the above.

### High risk groups include:

- Pregnant or breastfeeding women.
- People under 5 years or 65 years and older.
- Limited sun exposure e.g. the housebound or people in institutions such as a care home
- People whose clothing covers up most of their skin when outdoors.
- Ethnic groups with dark skin.

## WHY DO WE NEED VITAMIN D?

Vitamin D (also called ergocalciferol or colecalciferol) is important for bone health. It is needed to absorb calcium, phosphate and other nutrients from our diet and helps to keep bones strong and healthy.

## WHERE DO WE GET VITAMIN D FROM?

Around 90% of the vitamin D we require is made when our skin is exposed to direct ultra violet B (UVB) rays from sunlight. Most people in the UK should get sufficient Vitamin D from sunlight during the spring/summer months. A small amount of vitamin D (10%) comes from the food we eat. Whilst it is important to eat foods that contain vitamin D regularly, this cannot make up for lack of sunlight exposure, especially during the autumn and winter months. This is why people may be advised to take vitamin D supplements.

## HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY VITAMIN D LEVELS ARE LOW?

Testing of vitamin D levels is not routinely conducted as it is generally accepted that in the UK, without supplements the majority of people will have low Vitamin D levels during the winter months due to the low levels of sunlight. However your GP may check your blood levels if you have symptoms of vitamin D deficiency or have risk factors that may affect the health of your bones.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH VITAMIN D?

A mild lack of vitamin D may not cause any symptoms. However, some people with a mild to moderate lack of vitamin D may have vague symptoms such as tiredness and general aches and pains. A severe lack of vitamin D - known as vitamin D deficiency - can cause bones to become soft and weak, which can lead to bone deformities. In adults, it can lead to osteomalacia, which causes bone pain and tenderness.

Longer, healthier lives for all the people in Croydon

## HOW TO AVOID LOW VITAMIN D LEVELS

In the UK, most people are able to get the majority of their vitamin D requirement from sunlight, from late March through to the end of September, by exposing areas of skin, generally uncovered (such as forearms, hands or lower legs) when in the sun for short periods of time. It is however important to remember not to allow skin to burn.

## TIPS ON SAFE EXPOSURE TO SUNLIGHT

- Regular exposure, ideally daily, for around 10-15 minutes between 11am to 3pm from late March to the end of September, in the UK is adequate for most people. This should be less than the time it takes for skin to redden or burn.
- **Covering up and protecting skin with sunscreen** (at least SPF 15 and UVA protection) before skin starts to turn red or burn is important. Extra care should be taken with children.
- Prolonged exposure that leads to burning or dark tanning is **not** a safe way to gain vitamin D and increases risk of skin cancer.
- Sunbeds are **not** a recommended source of vitamin D.
- Vitamin D cannot be made from sunlight exposure through windows, as the UVB rays do not travel through glass.

## OTHER SOURCES OF VITAMIN D

Between October and early March there is generally not enough sunlight to maintain adequate vitamin D levels and so we need to rely on dietary sources of vitamin D and supplements.

Foods that contain Vitamin D include oily fish (e.g. sardines, herring, salmon



and mackerel), red meat, liver, egg yolk and fortified foods such as margarines and some breakfast cereals.

Food sources alone may not provide sufficient Vitamin D during the winter months and so Vitamin D supplements are recommended for everyone, at least during Autumn/ Winter. Children under 5 years and other risk groups are advised to take supplements all year round.

## WHERE TO GET VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENTS

There are a wide range of Vitamin D Supplements available to buy at low cost from pharmacies, most supermarkets and health food shops. For maintaining good teeth and bone health **a product that contains 10 to 25 micrograms i.e. (400 units to 1,000 units) of Vitamin D is generally advised.**

## HOW MUCH VITAMIN D WILL I NEED?

It is now recommended by Public Health England that everyone should consider taking a daily supplement containing **10 mcg (400 units)** of vitamin D during the winter months to maintain good bone health.

If you fall within a risk group for vitamin D deficiency (see overleaf), then it is recommended that you consider taking a Vitamin D supplement dose of **10 mcg (400 units)** once daily, all year round.

Adults who have previously received treatment for vitamin D deficiency or insufficiency will require more vitamin D, usually **20 to 25 micrograms (800 units—1,000 units)** a day. If you have previously received prescriptions for 20mcg (800 units) of Vitamin D, it is acceptable to buy a 25mcg (1,000 unit) vitamin D supplement instead, if this strength is more readily available.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding are advised to take 400 units of Vitamin D daily. Pregnant women on a low income may be able to get free Healthy Start vitamins tablets that contain 10mcg (400 units) of vitamin D from some baby clinics and children's centres.



## ARE THERE ANY RISKS WITH VITAMIN D?

Although the risk of having too much vitamin D is extremely rare, you are advised to check with a health professional such as a pharmacist, before you start taking vitamin D supplements. This is particularly important if you are already taking or have been advised to take other supplements, (e.g. folic acid in pregnancy) as the pharmacist can help you select a product that meets all of your health needs.

