

Changes to Vitamin D Prescribing

GP practices in Bedfordshire and Luton will no longer routinely prescribe vitamin D supplements. 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 **very low, (i.e. Vitamin D deficiency)**.
- If your Vitamin D levels are found to be **low (i.e. Vitamin D insufficiency)** and you have 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.

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.

Your health professional advises that you purchase:

- A preparation containing 10 micrograms (400 units of vitamin D)
- A preparation containing between 20 and 25 micrograms (800 - 1,000 units) of vitamin D (if you were previously prescribed 800 units it would be acceptable to take 1000 units as they are more readily available)
- 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:
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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>

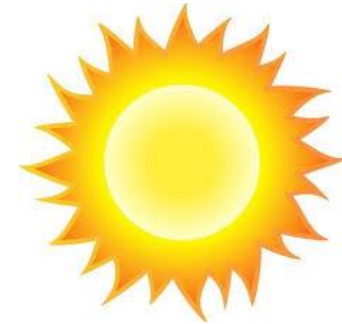
National Osteoporosis Society - Healthy bones and risk – vitamin D

<https://www.nos.org.uk/healthy-bones-and-risks/Vitamin-D>

The Association of UK Dieticians – Food Fact Sheet Vitamin D

<https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/VitaminD.pdf>

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 on NHS prescription in Bedfordshire and Luton

Bedfordshire CCG

Luton CCG

Why Do We Need Vitamin D?

Vitamin D (also called 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?

We get vitamin D from exposure to the sun and through our diet. Whilst it is important to eat foods that contain vitamin D on a regular basis, this alone is unlikely to provide you with adequate intake, especially during the autumn and winter months when sun exposure is lower in the UK. This is why people are advised to take vitamin D supplements.

How Will I Know If My Vitamin D Levels Are Low?

Testing of vitamin D levels may be indicated if your GP feels you have symptoms of very low levels of vitamin D (deficiency) and you have risk factors that may affect the health of your bones.

What Happens If You Do Not Have Enough Vitamin D?

Low vitamin D levels may not cause any symptoms. However, some people with a mild to moderately low levels may have vague symptoms such as tiredness and general aches and pains. Very low levels of vitamin D (deficiency) can cause bones to become soft and weak. In adults, it can lead to condition called osteomalacia, which causes bone pain and tenderness.

Vitamin D Deficiency Risk Groups

Some people are at greater risk of having very low vitamin D levels than others.

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 facilities such as a care home
- People whose clothing covers up most of their skin when outdoors.
- Ethnic groups with darker skin (more sun exposure required to produce same amount of vitamin D as people with lighter skin tones due to higher concentration of melanin.)

Sunlight

National guidance states that regular exposure to areas such as forearms and hands, 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. Sunbeds are **not** a recommended source of vitamin D.

It is important to avoid sun burn. Prolonged exposure leading to burning or dark tanning is **not** a safe way to gain vitamin D and increases risk of skin cancer.

Other sources of vitamin D

Food in the diet can also contribute to vitamin D levels, but it is difficult to obtain enough vitamin D from diet alone. Vitamin D can be found naturally in oily fish (such as salmon, mackerel and sardines), eggs and meat. Some manufacturers add it voluntarily to some breakfast cereals, soya products, some dairy products, powdered milks and fat spreads.

How Much Vitamin D do I Need?

It is recommended that all adults should consider taking a daily supplement containing **10 micrograms (400 units)** of vitamin D to maintain good bone health.

Adults who have received treatment for low or very low levels of vitamin D will require more vitamin D to maintain good bone health, a supplement of **20 micrograms (800 units)** daily is recommended.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding 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.

Having very high vitamin D levels as a result of treatment is very rare. Follow the advice of your GP or pharmacist and take the dose advised in this leaflet to ensure you get the correct amount of vitamin D.