

# THE SUNSHINE VITAMIN - VITAMIN D

## WHAT IS IT?

- Vitamin D is known as the sunshine vitamin.
- It is produced by the body in response to sun exposure. An inactive form of vitamin D in the skin gets converted into an active when it is exposed to the UVB rays of the sun.
- It can also be consumed in food or taken as a vitamin supplement.

## WHY DO WE NEED VITAMIN D?

- Essential for strong bones and teeth
- Helps the body to absorb calcium from food to keep the body's bone cells healthy
- Protect bones
- Support muscle health
- Assists in the prevention of cancer
- Regulate insulin levels and helps with diabetes management
- Assist the immune system of the body
- Help with healthy cell growth
- Lower the risk of inflammation
- Help to regulate blood pressure and supports a healthy heart
- Assists with brain development and function to maintain an effective nervous system.

## SOURCES OF VITAMIN D

- 80% of the body's vitamin D requirement are produced in the skin following sun exposure. The rest can be obtained by consuming foods that is rich in vitamin D, for instance fatty fish (tuna, mackerel and salmon), cod liver oil, egg yolks, fortified dairy (cheese and soy milk) and grain products.
- If the intake of these foods are not enough, a good vitamin D supplement should be used.

## WHO IS AT RISK TO DEVELOP A DEFICIENCY?

- Sometimes people do not get into the sun due to
  - effective campaigns about the dangers of sun exposure
  - lifestyles that have changed from playing outdoors to rather spending time indoors in front of computers and televisions
- People at risk to develop vitamin D deficiency are those individuals
  - who stay indoors
  - suffering from milk allergies
  - following a strict vegan diet
  - with digestive problems; when the body's digestive system

does not function properly, absorption of vitamin D is defective e.g. Crohn's disease, cystic fibrosis

- living in an area with severe pollution so that the sun rays cannot reach the skin
- with liver and kidney problems where the absorption of vitamin D is hampered
- suffering from Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, anxiety, depression and osteoporosis.
- The requirement is 5 to 10 minutes of direct sun on the skin, three times per week.

## WHO NEEDS EXTRA VITAMIN D?

Darker skinned individuals, the elderly and obese individuals may benefit from extra supplementation with vitamin D because:

- The pigment that is responsible for darker skin tones (called melanin) absorbs UV rays and therefore decreases the rate of activation of vitamin D. Individuals with darker skins may therefore require 5–10 times more sun exposure to produce the required amount of vitamin D.
- With age, the body loses the elements necessary to make vitamin D, which causes the vitamin D production to decline. It is estimated that individuals over the age of 60 years produces almost 75% less vitamin D than someone who is 20 years old.
- Vitamin D can be stored in fat cells (adipose tissue). In very overweight individuals, vitamin D is so efficiently stored that it is no longer available for use in bone metabolism.



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## TAKE NOTE

The information provided in this article is for education purposes only and does not serve as a medical diagnosis. Members should always consult their healthcare provider with serious symptoms.

Please note that Heritage Health plans do not necessarily cover the costs of the condition/s described.

