



# VITAMIN D

## YOUR VITAMIN D IS LOW (DEFICIENT)

Following your recent blood test, we have found that your vitamin D level is low

We have prescribed you some high strength replacement to collect from the pharmacy to take for the next 7 weeks.

Following completion of this you should take 400iu of cholecalciferol (vitamin D) daily to maintain your vitamin D levels (this can be bought over the counter from the pharmacy).

Please contact us in 3 months' time to request a 'bone profile' blood test to ensure your levels have corrected.

## WHY DO WE NEED VITAMIN D?

Vitamin D is needed to absorb calcium, phosphate and other nutrients from our diet. This is essential for good health, strong bones and muscles.

## WHERE DO WE GET VITAMIN D FROM?

Around 90% of the vitamin D we require is made when our skin is exposed to direct ultraviolet B (UVB) rays from sunlight. Darker skins need more sun to get the same amount of vitamin D than a light-skinned person.

- The sunlight needed has to fall directly on to bare skin (through a window is not enough).
- 2-3 exposures of sunlight per week in the spring and summer months (**April to September**) are enough to achieve healthy vitamin D levels that last through the year.

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 a small amount of vitamin D comes from the food we eat.

Foods that contain vitamin D include oily fish (such as sardines, pilchards, herring, trout, tuna, salmon and mackerel), red meat, liver, egg yolk, mushroom and tofu.

## WHO IS AT RISK OF VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY?

- 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
- Ethnic groups with dark skin
- People who follow a strict vegetarian or vegan diet
- People who are obese or significantly overweight
- Certain medicines may reduce your Vitamin D levels (i.e. medicines for epilepsy or HIV)

## 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.

### Healthy Start Vitamins

Some women and children up to the age of 4 years are eligible for free vitamin supplements, which includes vitamin D, under the Healthy Start Scheme. Speak to your midwife or health visitor for more information or alternatively visit [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk).

## HOW MUCH VITAMIN D SHOULD I TAKE?

Public Health England recommends that in the autumn and winter months (**October to March**) **EVERYONE** should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (400 units) of vitamin D. For advice refer to <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>

Most Vitamin D supplements are available to buy over the counter and Healthy Start Vitamins contain this amount, but it is advisable to check this with your pharmacist before purchasing. People in the 'at risk' group and babies and children under 5 years of age should consider taking a daily supplement throughout the year.

Vitamin D supplements for children and adults are available to buy over the counter in many pharmacies, health food stores and major supermarkets. Prices may vary amongst retailers; some products may cost as little as £1 per month.

## ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS WITH VITAMIN D?

It is very unusual to get side-effects from vitamin D if taken in the recommended dose. However, very high doses can raise calcium levels in the blood. This would cause symptoms such as thirst, passing a lot of urine, nausea or vomiting, dizziness and headaches. If you have taken very high doses and have these symptoms, you should see your GP as soon as you can, so that your calcium level can be checked with a blood test.