

# Vitamin D for Your Child

## What is the latest information on vitamin D?

New research shows that this important nutrient is needed in greater amounts than we used to think. Changes in the way we live have made it so many people do not get enough vitamin D. We are learning more about how this can affect our health.

## Why is vitamin D important?

Vitamin D helps make strong bones and teeth and prevents rickets. Rickets is a softening and weakening of bones in children. It also helps prevent illness, heart disease, some types of cancer, diabetes and other diseases.

Even a mild lack of vitamin D may lead to mental or physical delays, unusual irritability, muscle or joint pain, and poor growth.

## How much vitamin D do children need each day?

Vitamin D is measured in international units (IU). The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 400 IU each day for infants and children.

## What foods contain vitamin D?

Foods that have vitamin D naturally are limited to fatty fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel, and sardines) liver, cod liver oil and egg yolks. Vitamin D is added to other foods, including milk, infant formula, and some yogurts, margarine, cereal, and orange juice products. However, unless someone eats 14 ounces of fatty fish or drinks four 8 ounce cups of milk or fortified orange juice each day, it is hard to get enough vitamin D from foods.



## Does everyone need to take a vitamin D supplement?

The use of a supplement is recommended for most people. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about taking supplements.

## What type of supplements should my child take?

Supplements are available in many forms. Be sure to read the label and follow the directions.

**Infants:** Liquid vitamin D drops are available separately or as a multi-vitamin with vitamins A, C, iron, or fluoride. Use only the dropper that comes with the product and follow the directions on the package.

**Children:** Chewable multivitamins with vitamin D are available. Most labels advise a ½ tablet for children younger than four, and to take one tablet a day for ages four through adult.

## Can't my child get enough vitamin D from sunshine?

People can make vitamin D when their skin is exposed to the sun but this is not a dependable source in Washington State. Skin makes little, if any, vitamin D in northern climates like Washington, except during the summer months. This puts all of us at greater risk for vitamin D deficiency.



There are many factors that affect your exposure to sunlight and the amount of vitamin D your skin can make from it, including:

- Amount of time you spend outdoors
- How much clothing you wear outdoors
- Whether you use sunscreen
- Your skin pigmentation and the age of your skin
- Season of the year and time of day
- Air pollution or smog
- Weather

## Can my child get too much vitamin D?

Current research suggests that there is not a risk of getting too much vitamin D from a combination of sunlight, food, and vitamin supplements when used in the recommended amounts.

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