

- Vitamins

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO vitamin D

THIS HEALTH SUPERSTAR DOES MORE THAN YOU THINK!

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Research shows that almost one in four Aussies don't get their adequate fix of vitamin D. The good news? There are plenty of ways to top up your levels – and some can be done in-doors! Shauna Anderson, a naturopath and expert for Whole Earth & Sea (wholeearth-sea.com.au), explains how...



WHAT IS VITAMIN D?

Vitamin D is often called the 'sunshine vitamin' because it's produced by your skin in response to sunlight. It keeps our bones, teeth, muscles and immune system healthy. Studies show it may also help to assist weight loss and alleviate depression. There are two kinds of vitamin D: vitamin D₂ comes from UV exposure and plant sources like mushrooms that have been grown in UV light, while vitamin D₃ is found in some animal food sources.

VITAMIN D AND YOUR BONES

Along with calcium, vitamin D is essential for keeping our bones healthy and strong.

"It's well established that low levels of vitamin D can contribute to bones becoming more fragile and prone to breaking due to loss of bone mineral density," says Shauna.

"In mild cases, this is known as osteopenia. In more severe cases, this is known as osteoporosis, which occurs when your bones lose calcium and other minerals at a rate that's too fast for your body to replace.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A DEFICIENCY?

While osteopenia and osteoporosis occur over an extended period of time, Shauna says more immediate symptoms of vitamin deficiency include muscle pain and frequent illnesses. "Studies show vitamin D helps boost our immunity and may also play a role in im-

proving our muscular strength,” she explains. “Vitamin D also supports a healthy pregnancy and foetal development.”

If you think you might have a deficiency, you should consult your doctor who can check your vitamin D levels with a blood test.

HOW MUCH SUN DO I NEED?

Fair-skinned people need an average of about 10 minutes of sun exposure in summer and 30 minutes in winter to get their vitamin D fix, while people with darker skin may need longer. However, with skin cancer risks due to sun exposure a big concern, you may also want to chat to a doctor about whether you should consider taking vitamin D supplements. “With just under one in four Australians vitamin D deficient and a growing indoor lifestyle, coupled with anti-cancer sun protective measures, it’s not unreasonable to consider a supplement,” says Shauna.

WHAT ABOUT FOOD SOURCES?

Oily fish, fish oil, liver, egg yolk and butter are all good sources of vitamin D₃. One of the best is wild salmon.

“Farmed salmon contains only 25 per cent of the vitamin D in wild salmon,” says Shauna. “The average person would also need to eat wild salmon or a similar fish every day to get the recommended dose of vitamin D.”

While getting enough vitamin D from food can be harder for vegans, Shauna says fortunately, there are now vegan options for supplements on the market.