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Right foods and sun exposure for your daily vitamin D needs

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During winter, we prefer staying indoors. But this can increase the risk of vitamin D deficiency, as sun exposure is the easiest way to get the nutrient. A minimum of 15-20 minutes of early morning sun exposure is required to meet our daily needs of the vitamin and maintain long-term health.

Dr Sudha Menon from Bengaluru tells us, “Vitamin D helps strengthen our immune system. It is beneficial for our mental health and aids in the management of depression symptoms. It is needed to keep bones, teeth and muscles healthy. While calcium is necessary for bone and tooth healthy, vitamin D is required to absorb calcium from meals. Vitamin D also plays an integral role in skin protection and rejuvenation.” According to a study published in the

International Journal of Research in Orthopaedics in 2020, vitamin D deficiency and insufficiency affect 76% of Indians. Dr Menon explains that Indian skin has a higher level of melanin, which limits the body’s ability to absorb sunlight. Add to this, the already inadequate solar exposure due to use of sun block creams. Another reason could be related to diet as a significant part of the population is vegetarian and there aren’t many veg foods that are rich in vitamin D, notes Dr Menon.

ADJUST YOUR DIET

In the absence of adequate sun exposure in winter months, you can still get vitamin D by adding the right foods to your meals. You can include milk and milk products, fish oil, mushrooms, and egg yolk in your regular diet.

WHAT ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS?

Vitamin D supplements are typically provided to pregnant women, newborns, women in menopause, and anyone over 65. Supplements should only be taken if your doctor has prescribed them.

Prevention is better than cure. So, try to eat foods high in vitamin D. Maintain a healthy body weight and sit in the sun for at least 15-20 minutes per day. And look out for vitamin D insufficiency signs before it’s too late. Bone pain and back discomfort, lethargy, tiredness, frequent infections, delayed wound healing, hair fall, muscle pain, and anxiety are some of the likely symptoms. If you have a couple of these, consider getting your vitamin D levels examined.