



Press Notice

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01BST THURSDAY 21st JULY 2016

Ten micrograms of vitamin D daily needed to protect bone and muscle health

To protect bone and muscle health, everyone needs vitamin D equivalent to an average daily intake of 10 micrograms, Public Health England (PHE) advised the government today.

This advice is based on the recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) following its review of the evidence on vitamin D and health.

Vitamin D is made in the skin by the action of sunlight and this is the main source of vitamin D for most people. SACN could not say how much vitamin D is made in the skin through exposure to sunlight, so it is therefore recommending a daily dietary intake of 10 micrograms.

PHE advises that in spring and summer, the majority of the population get enough vitamin D through sunlight on the skin and a healthy, balanced diet¹. During autumn and winter everyone will need to rely on dietary sources of vitamin D. Since it is difficult for people to meet the 10 microgram recommendation from consuming foods naturally containing or fortified with vitamin D, people should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D in autumn and winter.

People whose skin has little or no exposure to the sun, like those in institutions such as care homes, or who always cover their skin when outside, risk vitamin D deficiency and need to

¹ The PHE National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) shows that average population vitamin D blood levels are higher at the end of the summer compared to the end of the winter despite dietary intakes of vitamin D being roughly the same throughout the year. This is because there are not enough Ultra Violet B (UVB) rays, which are needed to make vitamin D, in sunlight in the autumn and winter.

take a supplement throughout the year. Ethnic minority groups with dark skin, from African, Afro-Caribbean and South Asian backgrounds, may not get enough vitamin D from sunlight in the summer² and therefore should consider taking a supplement all year round.

Children aged one to four years should have a daily 10 microgram vitamin D supplement. PHE recommends that babies are exclusively breastfed until around six months of age. As a precaution, all babies under one year should have a daily 8.5-10 microgram vitamin D supplement to ensure they get enough. Children who have more than 500ml of infant formula a day do not need any additional vitamin D as formula is already fortified.

Dr Louis Levy, head of nutrition science at Public Health England, said:

“A healthy, balanced diet and short bursts of sunshine will mean most people get all the vitamin D they need in spring and summer. However, everyone will need to consider taking a supplement in the autumn and winter if you don’t eat enough foods that naturally contain vitamin D or are fortified with it. And those who don’t get out in the sun or always cover their skin when they do, should take a vitamin D supplement throughout the year.”

Vitamin D supplements are available free-of-charge for low-income families on the Healthy Start scheme.

Vitamin D regulates the amount of calcium and phosphate in the body, both needed for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. It is found naturally in a small number of foods including oily fish, red meat, liver and egg yolks and in fortified food like breakfast cereals and fat spreads.

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

1. Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation’s health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. www.gov.uk/phe Twitter: @PHE_uk Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland
2. The latest data from the PHE National Diet and Nutrition Survey (2008/12) shows that 23% of adults aged 19 to 64 years, 21% of adults aged 65 years and above and 22% of children aged 11 to 18 years have low levels of vitamin D in their blood. This is not the same as having a deficiency, where you would be unwell, but rather means that you are at greater risk of developing a deficiency. If a person is deficient of vitamin D they will be clinically unwell and will need to be treated by a doctor.

² This is because people with darker skin need slightly more time in the sun to produce the same amount of vitamin D as someone with lighter skin.

3. PHE recommends against people using sunbeds because extreme short-term use could cause severe burning and long-term damage to the skin, with a possible increased risk of developing skin cancer.
4. Updated PHE advice is detailed on NHS choices.
5. SACN is a committee of independent experts that advises Government on matters relating to diet, nutrition and health. Details of the committee, including working procedures and membership, are found at www.sacn.gov.uk.
6. SACN reviewed the evidence on vitamin D and health outcomes. In addition to musculoskeletal health, SACN reviewed the relationship between vitamin D and non-musculoskeletal health outcomes including cancer, Type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis and heart disease but found insufficient evidence to draw any firm conclusions.

Public Health England Press Office

Tel: 020 7654 8038

Email: sally.brown@phe.gov.uk or phe-pressoffice@phe.gov.uk

Out of hours: 020 8200 4400