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Guidance

Statement from PHE and NICE on vitamin D supplementation during winter

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vitamin-d-supplementation-during-winter-phe-and-nice-statement/statement-from-phe-and-nice-on-vitamin-d-supplementation-during-winter>

Preparing for winter: vitamin D

Vitamin D is needed for healthy bones and muscles. Everyone is advised to take a supplement of vitamin D during winter months.

Too little vitamin D can lead to bone problems such as rickets in children, and bone pain and muscle weakness in adults, which may also increase the risk of falls in older people.

There have been some reports about vitamin D potentially reducing the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19). As yet there is insufficient evidence to prove that it helps people respond to COVID-19, but as more evidence is accumulated, our understanding may change. Public Health England (PHE) and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) are working together to re-review the evidence on vitamin D and COVID-19. There are also trials underway which we are keeping a close eye on. In the meantime, people should follow the current UK government advice on vitamin D supplementation to maintain bone and muscle health.

When outdoors during the spring and summer, most people make enough vitamin D from sunlight on the skin but in the UK between October and early March, we can't make vitamin D from sunlight because the sun is too low in the sky. Because it's difficult to get enough vitamin D from food, it's best to take a vitamin D supplement during the autumn and winter.

It is likely that many of us have been indoors more than usual this spring and summer, and some of us have been shielding, so we might not have been making enough vitamin D from sunlight. So, it's even more important this year to take a vitamin D supplement as we go into the winter months.

Some of us are more at risk of not having enough vitamin D even in spring and summer, including those with dark skin (such as those with African, African-Caribbean or south Asian backgrounds), those who are not outdoors often, those in care homes, and those who cover up most of the skin when outdoors. We advise these people to take a vitamin D supplement all year round.

There are a range of products and doses available at supermarkets, pharmacies and other retailers; the recommended dose of vitamin D is 10 micrograms (400 International Units (IU)) per day. Taking more than this dose is not necessary, but if you are unable to find a vitamin D supplement providing 10 micrograms (400 IU), products providing up to 25 micrograms (1000 IU) are suitable for everyone.

More advice on vitamin D, including amounts for babies and young children, can be found on the NHS.UK (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>) website.

Women and children who qualify for the Healthy Start scheme can get free supplements containing the recommended amounts of vitamin D. See the Healthy Start website (<http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/>) for more information.

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