



Low Vitamin D

What it does, who's at risk, and how we treat it

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PATIENT GUIDE

Dr Reguram Sandrasegaram • Young Street Medical & Dental Centre

Mostly made by your skin — not found in your diet.

Vitamin D keeps your bones and muscles strong. In Australia, the trick is getting enough sun safely — without raising your skin cancer risk.



Sunlight
makes most of your vitamin D — only a little from food



Often none
low vitamin D usually causes no symptoms at all



50+
the blood level (nmol/L) usually targeted

Who's more likely to be low?




Little sun exposure
Spending most of your time indoors, working office hours or night shifts, or rarely getting outside.

- More likely if: indoor work, shift work, or you're largely housebound.




Darker or covered skin
More melanin, or skin that's mostly covered for cultural or religious reasons, means less vitamin D made per minute of sun.

- More likely if: a darker skin tone, or skin that's routinely covered.




Older age
Skin becomes less efficient at making vitamin D as we get older.

- More likely if: you're aged over 65.



Higher body weight
Vitamin D is fat-soluble and gets held in body fat, leaving less available in the blood.

- More likely if: a higher BMI.



Gut absorption problems
Coeliac disease, Crohn's disease or bariatric surgery can all reduce how much vitamin D your gut absorbs.

- More likely if: coeliac disease, inflammatory bowel disease, or previous bariatric surgery.



Pregnancy & babies
Breastfed babies of mothers with little sun exposure get very little vitamin D through milk alone.

- More likely if: you're pregnant or breastfeeding, or have a breastfed baby with little sun exposure.

Does everyone need a blood test?

No — testing isn't a routine check for everyone. It's generally reserved for people with symptoms or one of the risk factors above. We test 25-OH vitamin D, and in Australia a level of 50nmol/L or more is usually the target, with some margin for the seasonal dip over winter.



Getting Your Vitamin D Up

Safe sun, food and supplements — and keeping it there

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Three ways to top it up

 **1**


Safe sunlight

Often just a few minutes most days via everyday activities — your main source

 **2**

A few foods


Oily fish, eggs, and milk or cereal fortified with vitamin D — rarely enough alone

 **3**

A supplement

Usually a daily vitamin D3 — your GP advises the dose and how long

Getting sun safely — the Australian balance

 **UV 3 or above (most of the year)**

- A few minutes most days via everyday activities is usually enough
- Protect your skin the rest of the day — sunscreen, a hat or shade
- No deliberate sunbaking — more sun doesn't mean more vitamin D, and it raises skin cancer risk
- Darker skin generally needs a little longer in the sun

 **UV under 3 (cooler months)**

- Spend a little longer outdoors around the middle of the day
- Uncovering some skin, like your arms, can help when practical
- Sun protection generally isn't needed for short periods under UV3
- Southern Australia's winter sun is weak — a supplement is often more reliable

Good to know

More isn't better — very high doses taken long-term can raise your calcium levels and cause harm, so stick to the dose your GP advises. Tell your GP about any other health conditions first, and expect a recheck a few months after starting, since levels take time to recover.

Low Vitamin D Is Common — And Easily Fixed

Safe sun and the right supplement mean stronger bones and muscles.

We'll check your level, sort the cause, and recheck in a few months. — Dr Regu