



Vitamin D and your health

Why do I need vitamin D?

Vitamin D helps your body absorb and use calcium for strong bones and teeth. Vitamin D also helps muscles, nerves and the immune system work properly.

Where can I get vitamin D?

You can get vitamin D from food and supplements. Your body can also make vitamin D when you are outside and the sun is on your bare skin. Many factors affect how much vitamin D your body can make such as:

- **Age:** less is made as you get older
- **Skin colour:** less is made by darker skin
- **Season:** little or none is made in the winter
- **Sunscreen:** blocks your skin from making vitamin D

It is best not to rely on the sun to meet your vitamin D needs since it increases the risk of skin cancer.

How much vitamin D do I need each day?

Recommended amounts of vitamin D include the total intake from food and supplements.

Age	Aim for	Stay below
0-6 months	400IU (10µg)	1000IU (25µg)
6-12 months	400IU (10µg)	1500IU (38µg)
1-3 years	600IU (15µg)	2500IU (63µg)
4-8 years	600IU (15µg)	3000IU (75µg)
9-70 years*	600IU (15µg)	4000IU (100µg)
Over 70 years	800IU (20µg)	4000IU (100µg)

IU = International Units, µg = microgram

*Including those who are pregnant or breastfeeding

Do some people need more vitamin D?

If you take certain medications or have specific medical conditions, your health care provider may suggest you take more vitamin D. People with osteoporosis should aim for 800-2000IU (20-50µg) vitamin D per day.

Which foods contain vitamin D?

Only a few foods contain vitamin D naturally, such as egg yolk and fatty fish. The amount of vitamin D in fatty fish varies widely.

In Canada, vitamin D must be added to certain foods including cow milk and margarine. Other foods such as yogurt, cheese, goat milk and plant-based beverages may also have added vitamin D. Check the nutrition facts table to see if vitamin D has been added. The table below lists some foods that contain vitamin D.

Should I take a supplement?

Food sources of vitamin D are limited. Most people do not get the recommended amount of vitamin D from the foods they eat. A daily vitamin D supplement, as a single supplement or as part of a multivitamin, can help you meet your needs.

In addition, Health Canada recommends the following two groups of people take a daily vitamin D supplement of 400IU:

- Infants and young children under 2 years of age who are breastfed or fed some human milk
- Adults over the age of 50 years

What should I look for when choosing a vitamin D supplement?

- Choose a supplement that has a Natural Product Number (NPN). A NPN means the supplement meets Health Canada's safety standards for natural health products
- Choose a form of vitamin D that is best for you. Single vitamin D supplements come in three main forms:
 - **Liquid:** recommended for children under 4 years of age but can be used for all ages
 - **Chewable:** for people who can safely chew and swallow
 - **Pill:** for people who can safely swallow a pill
- Always check the label to confirm the dose and follow the instructions

Most multivitamins contain vitamin D. If you take a multivitamin check the label to see how much vitamin D it contains. Talk to a dietitian, pharmacist, or your

health care provider if you have questions about the type or amount of supplement that's best for you.

Food sources of vitamin D

Food	Serving size	Amount of vitamin D	
		IU	µg
Salmon, sockeye, canned	75g (2 ½ oz)	557	13.9
Salmon, pink	75g (2 ½ oz)	414	10.4
Mackerel, Pacific	75g (2 ½ oz)	343	8.6
Tuna, bluefin*	75g (2 ½ oz)	219	5.5
Salmon, chum	75g (2 ½ oz)	210	5.2
Salmon, Atlantic	75g (2 ½ oz)	206	5.1
Herring, Atlantic	75g (2 ½ oz)	161	4.0
Trout	75g (2 ½ oz)	148	3.8
Sardines, Pacific	75g (2 ½ oz)	145	3.6
Halibut, Pacific or Atlantic	75g (2 ½ oz)	144	3.6
Whitefish, lake	75g (2 ½ oz)	135	3.4
Tuna, yellowfin *	75g (2 ½ oz)	106	2.6
Cow milk	250mL (1 cup)	103	2.6
Fortified orange juice	250mL (1 cup)	100	2.5
Fortified plant-based beverages such as soy, oat and almond**	250mL (1 cup)	84	2.1
Mackerel, Atlantic	75g (2 ½ oz)	78	2.0
Sardines, Atlantic	75g (2 ½ oz)	70	1.7
Margarine	10mL (2 tsp)	66	1.6
Tuna, canned, light	75g (2 ½ oz)	36	0.9
Egg yolk	1	32	0.8

IU = International Units, µg = microgram

Source: Canadian Nutrient File 2015

* These fish are higher in mercury.

**Fortified plant-based beverages are not recommended for children under 2 years of age

For more information

- [HealthLinkBC File 68e Calcium and your health](#)
- Infant and toddler feeding guidelines:
 - [Baby's best chance](#)
 - [Toddler first steps](#)
- Vitamin D content of specific foods: [Canadian Nutrient File](#)
- For more nutrition information, call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered dietitian

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.