

## 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. For recommended serving limits see: [HealthLinkBC File #68m Mercury in Fish](#)

\*\*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