

WAYS TO MAINTAIN OPTIMUM VITAMIN D STATUS THIS SPRING

Public Health England has updated its long-standing advice about vitamin D, stating that everyone should supplement with 10 micrograms daily and not just ‘at-risk’ groups as recommended up until now. Supplementation is a vital addition to the diet, helping to safeguard against deficiency of vitamin D, which is required by the body for bone and muscle health.

Graham Keen, Executive Director of the Health Food Manufacturers Association said; *“Whilst vitamin D supplementation has long been recommended for key population groups, this broadened advice is welcome to help everyone maintain healthy joints and muscles. What’s more, this nutrient is backed by four key elements for success; the science is proven, the strategy is Government-led, a simplicity of message and a ready supply. We believe that, together, these factors will result in good uptake by the population and will demonstrate, yet again, the pivotal role that supplements can play in safeguarding the health of our nation.”*

Spring has now arrived, bringing with it longer, and hopefully warmer and sunnier days. As well as making us feel brighter, the sun is also good for maintaining optimum vitamin D status.

In March to September, longer daylight hours mean that the skin has more opportunity to synthesise vitamin D. So, with the UK’s current situation, it is important that we all take advantage of sunny days to get out in the garden and for regular exercise when we can. Exposing the forearms, hands or lower legs to the sun, without sunscreen, for a short time between 11am and 3pm will help keep vitamin D status topped up. For people who don’t have access to their own outside space, going out once a day for a walk or run, or some other form of regular exercise is particularly important.

Vulnerable groups of the population at greatest risk of inadequate vitamin D status include children aged 1-4 years, and people who don’t often go outdoors such as the frail or housebound, those in care homes, or people who usually cover their skin when going outdoors. The Government recommends these groups take a daily 10 microgram vitamin D supplement all year round, to ensure they get enough. All other population groups, including pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding, are advised to consider taking a daily supplement, particularly during the winter months.

The recent Health of the Nation survey carried out by the HFMA revealed that under a third (31%) of Brits were aware of these Public Health England (PHE) recommendations that all adults and children over the age of five years should consider taking a vitamin D supplement throughout the winter months to help protect their bones, teeth and muscles. This lack of awareness causes concern that some people may be low in vitamin D and will particularly need to top up their levels up over the coming months.

With current guidelines advising ‘high-risk’ individuals and the elderly to self-isolate for 12 weeks, these people won’t be able to get outside as often as needed to absorb adequate vitamin D and this

could increase their risk of developing osteoporosis and broken bones. These identified groups should also consider increasing their vitamin D intake with other sources.

Supplements come in a variety of different formats such as tablets, sprays, liquids and drops so they are suitable for the whole family.

Nutritionist Dr Michele Sadler, Scientific Advisor to the Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA), says *"An adequate supply of vitamin D, also known as the 'sunshine vitamin', is essential all year round to keep your body healthy. Not only is it good for bones and teeth, but research has shown that it also plays a role in the immune system. The three main ways to get adequate vitamin D are from exposure of the skin to sunlight, by eating foods that are naturally rich in vitamin D or fortified with the vitamin, and from a dietary supplement.*

"Your body naturally produces vitamin D when it is directly exposed to sunlight containing ultraviolet B radiation and daily sunlight exposure is how most people get sufficient vitamin D. It's important that everyone has daily exposure to sunlight outdoors, particularly during the spring and summer months, as ultraviolet B does not penetrate through glass.

"Vitamin D is also present in a limited range of foods, which contributes to supplies of vitamin D, but it is difficult to get enough from your diet alone. Including the following foods in your diet will help to top up your vitamin D intake:

- *Oily fish, such as salmon, sardines and mackerel*
- *Red meat and liver*
- *Eggs*
- *Fortified fat spreads*
- *Fortified breakfast cereals*
- *Full fat milk*

"Vulnerable population groups like the housebound and children 1-4 years are advised by PHE to take a daily 10 microgram supplement, and all adults and children over 5 years to consider this, particularly during the winter months."

ENDS

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The HFMA

The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) is the voice of the UK's natural health industry and represents more than 125 manufacturers and suppliers of natural health products.

Founded in 1965, the HFMA is a not-for-profit organisation which operates long-standing codes of practice to ensure that member companies adhere to high standards and offer good quality, safe products supported by responsible, lawful information. For further information about the HFMA, visit www.hfma.co.uk.