

Q. Should I take a vitamin D supplement?

A. Probably. If you spend a lot of time indoors, there's a good chance you're low on vitamin D.

Why? A little time in the sun (15 to 20 minutes a day) helps the body make vitamin D. But most people spend a lot more time inside, at home, at work, or in the car than they used to.

Is your vitamin D level low?

If you read the magazine headlines in the checkout line, you might think everybody should take vitamin D. For years, it's been touted as a kind of cure-all for a long list of health problems.

About 1 billion people have low vitamin D levels.¹ That's about 13 percent of the world's population. But some parts of the world, and some groups of people, have an even higher percentage.

If your doctor thinks your vitamin D level is too low, a basic blood test can find out.

Vitamin D health claims

Can getting enough vitamin D improve your health?

Past studies suggest that people with higher levels of vitamin D may have a lower risk for disease. Diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, cancer, and heart disease. But these studies don't prove vitamin D is the reason, just that there is a link between the two.



In the last four years, nearly 16,000 scientific articles were published on vitamin D. This new research suggests vitamin D may not be as good at preventing disease as we once thought. But marketers don't want you to know that. Vitamin D sales bring in an around \$713 million a year in revenue.²

"Just because low D levels and disease seem to be correlated, doesn't mean that vitamin D deficiency is the cause," says lifestyle medicine expert Dr. Michael Greger. "In only a handful of conditions have interventional studies proven vitamin D to be effective."³

If you are going to take vitamin D...

It may help reduce fatigue and improve bone health. And having enough D in your blood may help you live longer.⁴ But it's not

ASK THE WELLNESS DOCTOR

a cure-all for chronic disease and won't erase the impacts of poor food and lifestyle choices.

How much vitamin D should you take? Research suggests most people would benefit from taking 1,000 to 2,000 international units (IUs) of Vitamin D3.⁵

You'll also find vitamin D in mushrooms, eggs, and fortified foods like orange juice, cereal, and cheese. But your best source of vitamin D for better health? Sunshine and a brisk walk.

References

1. Naeem, Z. (2010). Vitamin D deficiency – An ignored epidemic. *International Journal of Health Statistics*, 4(1):V-VI. From: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3068797>
2. Taylor, C., et al. (2015). Questions about vitamin D for primary care practice: Input from an NIH conference. *American Journal of Medicine*, 128(11):1167-1170. doi: 10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.05.025
3. Greger, M. (2016). Will you live longer if you take vitamin D supplements? *Nutrition Facts*. From: <https://nutritionfacts.org/video/will-you-live-longer-if-you-take-vitamin-d-supplements>
4. Pilz, S., et al. (2016). Vitamin D and mortality. *Anticancer Research*, 36(3):1379-1387. From: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26977039>
5. Heaney, R.P. (2005). The vitamin D requirement in health and disease. *Journal of Steroid Biochemistry and Molecular Biology*, 97(1-2):13-19. From: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16026981>

