

Teaching parents the importance of vitamin D



The average toddler is only getting 27% of their reference nutrient intake of vitamin D from their foods, and fewer than 1 in 10 are taking any kind of vitamin supplement.¹

This is worrying, as vitamin D has a critical role in bone mineralisation and calcium absorption, and deficiency can cause muscle weakness, rickets and bone deformities.²

The Department of Health (DoH) recommends that babies under 1 year should take a daily vitamin D supplement between 8.5 to 10 micrograms while children aged one to four years should take a 10 microgram supplement.³

Supporting parents and carers

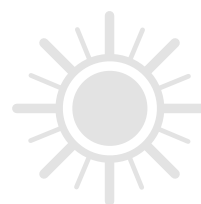
Community Practitioners are in a good position to advise parents and carers about the importance of vitamin D. The following summary is designed for community healthcare professionals, in order to facilitate and support discussions about vitamin D.

*Infants who are fed infant formula will not need supplements until they are receiving less than 500ml a day because formulas have vitamin D added.



Advice for parents:

Vitamin D and sunlight



- ✓ The body produces vitamin D through the action of sunlight on the skin, earning it the name 'the sunshine vitamin'.
- ✓ However, UK sunlight is an unreliable source of vitamin D for at least seven months of the year: October – April.⁴
- ✓ Asian and Afro-Caribbean toddlers are particularly vulnerable to deficiency due to their higher melanin skin pigmentation, and/or other physiological/lifestyle factors.⁵
- ✓ It is very important to wear sunscreen to avoid sunburn and skin cancer. However, a few minutes of unprotected sun exposure a day – before taking usual protective steps – has been recommended by many organisations** to produce vitamin D.⁶

**Recommended in a consensus statement by the British Association of Dermatologists, Cancer Research UK, Diabetes UK, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the National Heart Forum, the National Osteoporosis Society and the Primary Care Dermatology Society.

Advice for parents:

Dietary vitamin D

✓ Only a limited amount of vitamin D is naturally found in foods. Therefore it is very difficult for diet alone to provide all the vitamin D a toddler requires.



✓ Liver, oily fish and eggs are vitamin D rich foods, and should be included in the diet every week. However, these foods are not always favoured by the average toddler!

Fortified foods and drinks

✓ As so few foods contain vitamin D, some foods and drinks have had the vitamin added to them.

✓ Margarine, breakfast cereals and dairy products tend to have vitamin D added, but not all do, so it is important to check the label.

Vitamin D supplementation

✓ Children need sufficient vitamins and minerals to ensure healthy growth and development during the first five years.



✓ It is hard for diet alone to meet toddlers' needs, therefore the DoH advises a daily supplement that contains at least 10mcg of vitamin D.*³

✓ Parents can purchase vitamin D supplements in most supermarkets and chemists. Prices vary. However, parents who qualify for Healthy Start are entitled to free vitamin supplements. Make sure that parents on your caseload who qualify know their entitlement.

✓ New advice also recommends considering a vitamin D supplement of 10mcg/day during autumn and winter for everyone. Community practitioners should use opportunities to remind parents and carers of this recommendation.³

*Infants who are fed infant formula will not need supplements until they are receiving less than 500ml a day because formulas have vitamin D added.

References: 1. Bates B et al. National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Results from Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 (combined) of the Rolling Programme (2008/2009 – 2011/2012). Public Health England. 2014. 2. Infant & Toddler Forum. Nutrients: functions, sources & requirements Toddler Factsheet 1.1i. Available at: https://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=d9e60820-b8b8-4739-be07-415dcd31ee12&groupId=11803 [accessed June 2013]. 3. Public Health England. Press Release. PHE publishes new advice on vitamin D. 2016. Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/phe-publishes-new-advice-on-vitamin-d> (accessed Nov 2016). 4. Pearce S, Cheetham T. Diagnosis and Management of Vitamin D Deficiency. BMJ 2010;340:b5664. 5. Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN). Vitamin D and Health. Crown copyright. 2016 6. Consensus Vitamin D Position Statement. Available at: http://www.sunsmart.org.uk/prod_consump/groups/cr_common/@nre/@sun/documents/generalcontent/cr_052628.pdf

For more information.

Contact our free expert helpline on
0800 996 1234 or visit **www.eln.nutricia.co.uk**