



Vitamin D and pregnancy

itamin D helps to maintain your muscle and bone strength. It also helps your body absorb calcium from food. Vitamin D may also give you protection against developing diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer.

Adults who have vitamin D deficiency do not usually feel any different to normal, but in some cases they may have sore or weak muscles or have weakened bones.

In pregnancy, vitamin D also helps to develop your baby's bones. If you have a vitamin D deficiency it can affect the amount of calcium your baby has in their bones. In the case of severe deficiency this can cause a bone deformity called rickets.

How Do We Get Vitamin D?

From the sun

Most of our vitamin D is made in our skin by the sun's ultraviolet rays. You are at risk of a vitamin D deficiency if you have too little sunlight exposure. This may happen if you spend a lot of time indoors or cover most of your skin with clothing.

It is important to get enough sunlight to produce vitamin D without increasing your risk of skin cancer. In summer, many fair-skinned people make enough vitamin D from having their hands, arms and face (or equivalent area of skin) in the sun for a few minutes each day during normal, day-to-day outdoor activities. If you are fair-skinned it is best to avoid the sun between 11am and 3pm in summer unless you are wearing sun protection.

In winter, in Victoria, you will need two to three hours of sunlight each week.

People with darker skin need more sunlight and those with very dark skin may need 3 to 6 times as much sunlight as fair-skinned people.

From food

While some foods contain vitamin D, it is not sufficient to meet the body's needs; for most people their diet will only provide approximately 10% of what is required. Vitamin D is present in oily fish such as mackerel and sardines, as well as in eggs. In Australia it is also added in small amounts to margarine and some brands of milk. Although liver and cod liver oil contain vitamin D, they are not recommended in pregnancy as they contain too much vitamin A.

Calcium is also needed for bone health in mother and baby. Dairy foods are the richest sources of calcium, with two to three serves recommended per day (cheese, milk, yoghurt or calcium-supplemented soy milk).

Testing & Treatment for Vitamin D Deficiency

Mother

Vitamin D levels can be checked with a blood test. If the level is too low, you will be advised to take vitamin D supplements. You should take the amount of supplement prescribed by your doctor or midwife. OsteVit-D and Ostelin are the most common vitamin D supplements. Both contain the same amount of Vitamin D.

Baby

If a mother has been Vitamin D deficient during pregnancy, some babies may need to be given extra vitamin D after they are born. Pentavite, which is a liquid multivitamin mixture available from pharmacies, is suitable for this. If this is required the paediatrician will advise the appropriate dose and educate you on how to give it.



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After pregnancy

Women who have had low vitamin D levels during pregnancy are encouraged to continue to take vitamin D supplements after pregnancy to help protect against health problems such as osteoporosis (brittle bones). If you stop taking supplements you should have your level checked from time to time to see if it has stayed in the normal range.

If you have any further question on Vitamin D and pregnancy please feel free to discuss this with Marcia or a midwife at your next appointment.