

COVID 19: Vitamin D and BAME Populations

There is evidence of higher rates of infections and death from COVID-19 amongst Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people in comparison with the White British population. Queries are mounting over the role Vitamin D has in differing the COVID-19 outcomes.

Healthy vitamin D levels are good for immunity, vitamin D helps regulate the amount of calcium and phosphate in the body and this is essential for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. A lack of vitamin D can lead to bone deformities in children and a condition called osteomalacia in adults.

Sources of Vitamin D

Vitamin D is made in the skin by the action of sunlight when we are outdoors and this is the main source of vitamin D for most people. Skin colour and the amount of skin exposed to sunlight can affect how vitamin D is made. Here in the UK, we get most of our vitamin D from sunlight exposure around late March/early April to the end of September. From October to the beginning of April there is insufficient sunlight exposure for our skin to make vitamin D.

Vitamin D is naturally present in very few foods; food sources of vitamin D include oily fish (mackerel, salmon, herring, and sardines), red meat, liver and egg yolk. Vitamin D is sometimes added to some foods (fortified foods) such as spread fats and breakfast cereals.

Another source of vitamin D is supplements.

Who is at risk of Vitamin D deficiency?

People with darker skin are at increased risk of not having enough vitamin D as their skin is less efficient at producing vitamin D. In other words, they need to spend longer in the sun to produce the same amount of vitamin D as than someone with lighter skin.

People of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian family origin, and those who remain covered when outside, are at particular risk. Also, people who are housebound and older people are at increased risk, particularly if they are frail, because they may spend more time indoors and have limited sun exposure.

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Vitamin D and Coronavirus

There have been some news reports about vitamin D protecting from COVID 19, there is however currently not enough evidence to support this. While we don't yet know whether vitamin D reduces the risk of coronavirus complications, you may still want to take a supplement at the moment in line with the Public Health England recommendations below.

Public Health England recommends

That you should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D throughout the year if you:

- are not often outdoors – for example, if you're frail or housebound
- are in an institution like a care home
- usually wear clothes that cover up most of your skin when outdoors
- have dark skin – for example you have an African, African-Caribbean or south Asian background – you may also not get enough vitamin D from sunlight.

Buying Vitamin D supplements

Vitamin D supplements can be purchased over the counter from your local Chemist and a 3-month supply of 10 micrograms vitamin D tablets currently costs about £2.30 (as at 30.06.2020).