

## Vitamin D, your skin and UV light

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In Australia we need to balance the risk of skin cancer from too much sun exposure with maintaining adequate vitamin D levels. Sensible sun protection does not put people at risk of vitamin D deficiency.

The sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the best source of vitamin D. UVB interacts with cholesterol in the skin which leads to the formation of Vitamin D. Only relatively small amounts of Vitamin D come from the diet – mainly from eggs, oily fish and from liver and so the body relies on that which is formed in the skin for healthy levels.

### **What is Vitamin D and why is it important?**

Vitamin D is essential not only for strong and healthy bones and muscle, but also for good general health. In particular, our immune system relies on Vitamin D for optimum functioning.

### **How much sun do I need to maintain adequate vitamin D levels?**

Most people achieve sufficient vitamin D levels via the sun exposure they receive through day-to-day outdoor activities without needing to seek additional sun exposure.

During summer adequate vitamin D levels can be achieved from only a few minutes of sun exposure to their face, arms and hands or the equivalent area of skin, spread over a week.

In winter months in southern parts of Australia, where the UV radiation levels are less intense, people may need about two or three hours of sun exposure to the face, arms and hands or the equivalent area of skin, spread over a week to maintain adequate vitamin D levels.

### **Who is at risk of vitamin D deficiency?**

Some groups in the community have a higher risk of vitamin D deficiency because their level of sun exposure is inadequate. They include:

- naturally dark skinned people who need more UV exposure to produce adequate levels of vitamin D as the pigment in their skin reduces UV penetration;
- people who cover their skin for religious or cultural reasons;
- the elderly and people who are housebound or in institutional care;
- babies and infants of vitamin D deficient mothers, especially babies who are exclusively or partially breastfed; and
- patients with osteoporosis.

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People in these groups should consult their doctor for advice on whether or not they need to take a vitamin D supplement.

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### **Further reading:**

Vitamin D - Cancer Council of WA position statement  
UVR and the skin

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