

ASK THE DOCTOR



C.L. writes from Ganei Geula: "I've always known that babies needed extra Vitamin D, but what about all the rest of us?"

Vitamin D (or "D" for short) is an important requirement for adults as well as babies. It helps build healthy, strong bones and prevents osteoporosis (thin, brittle bones) in later life. Recently we have also begun to discover other benefits of D such as its role in the development of nerves and muscle and possible connection between low levels of D and the incidence of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

D is manufactured in the skin by the rays of the sun which convert natural substances in the body into D. D is also found in foods, especially in oily fish. A can of sardines or tuna has approximately 250 IU (International Units) of D, a tablespoon of cod liver oil has 1000 IU, and an egg has 20 IU. D is also present in dairy products, breads, and cereals which have been specially fortified with D.

Risk factors for D deficiency include a diet low in D and obesity. People with dark skin are more prone to this deficiency. Poor exposure to sun light is also a risk factor, but we encourage people to cover up in the sun in order to prevent skin cancers which are much more dangerous than low levels of D.

Requirements for D vary, depending on the health and lifestyle of the individual



Young people need to consume about 500 IU of D in their diets every day and older people need to consume about 1000 units a day.

Doctors are now discovering that many people have low levels of D. There is a lot of debate about where to draw the line but one suggestion is that people with below 32 ng/mL (nanograms per milliliter) have "insufficient" D levels, below 20 ng/ml is considered "deficient," and below 10 ng/ml is considered "severely deficient."

If you have low D levels, your doctor can prescribe a supplement. I personally prescribe the baby drops to adults in a daily or weekly dose, adjusted for each patient based on their D level, age, weight, health, and lifestyle. Levels should be re-checked after six months of treatment and if they are normal, then the dose is reduced for a maintenance period. It's important not to take too much D too quickly as this can actually be harmful.

I believe that in the coming years we will more fully appreciate the benefits of maintaining adequate Vitamin D levels.

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