

Vitamin D and its health benefits

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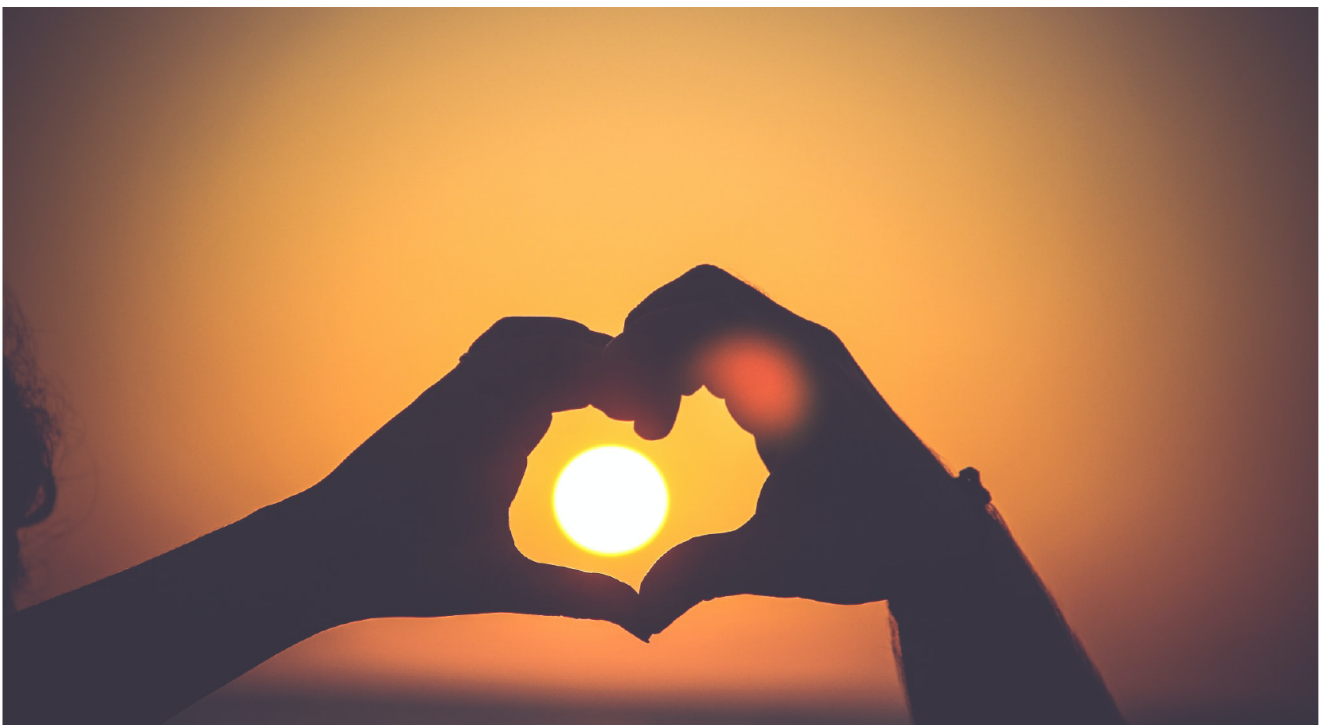
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Best known as the 'sunshine' vitamin, Vitamin D is important for bone health. This vitamin helps to increase our ability to absorb and retain calcium from our diets, contributing to stronger bones. Insufficient levels of Vitamin D has been shown to lead to softening of bones, also known as rickets in children or osteomalacia in adults. Vitamin D also plays a role in enabling the development of white blood cells to defend against infections; in the past, physicians had unknowingly prescribed sunlight to treat tuberculosis patients believing that exposure to light was what killed the bacteria!

The daily recommended amount for a healthy adult is 400 International Units (IU), or 10 micrograms of cholecalciferol – this also happens to be the compound that is produced when our skin interacts with sunlight. The main dietary sources of vitamin D are to be found in fish, eggs and mushrooms. Most of our dietary requirements actually come from fortified foods. However, deficiency is increasingly on the rise with reduced exposure to sunlight, sunscreen usage and dietary patterns. Today, we investigate these various factors.



Mushrooms are a good plant-based source of vitamin D



Vitamin D: The sunshine vitamin - How much is enough?

Mushrooms are a good plant-based source of vitamin D

Mushrooms are a powerhouse of nutrients and studied for their various health benefits. Varieties such as maitake, morel, chanterelle, oyster, and shiitake all contain natural Vitamin D. Mushrooms convert a precursor to vitamin D, called ergosterol, into vitamin D2 when exposed to UV light. Shiitake mushrooms, when dried outdoors in sunlight, express up to 400 times more vitamin D! Mushrooms also contain a host of other essential nutrients like vitamin B12 that are less common in plant-based diets.

The sunshine vitamin – how much is enough?

Vitamin D is technically a hormone because when exposed to ultraviolet B (UVB) of the sun, a vitamin D receptor in our skin naturally converts cholesterol in the skin to vitamin D3. 10–30 minutes of midday sunlight, several times per week is enough to provide all the required vitamin D. People with darker skin may need a little more than this because melanin, the pigment responsible for the skin color slows the absorption of the UVB. Excessive exposure to the sun should be avoided due to its link to skin cancer.



Are fortified foods healthy?

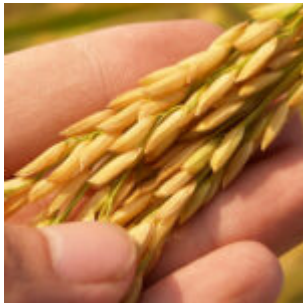
Where people are unable to glean enough vitamin D from their

diets, governments around the world have rolled out fortification regimens of common foods like milk, orange juice, spreads and cereals under public health policies. While this has certainly helped to curb malnutrition and deficiency in food insecure regions, these fortified foods tend to be heavily processed and contain high amounts of sodium and fats. We now also run the paradoxical risk of overdosing on fortified vitamins! Cut through the marketing hype of packaged, fortified foods. Begin with whole foods as your base and supplement as necessary.



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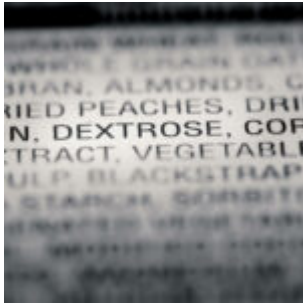


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