

# Childcare

## and Children's Health

AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS



## Vitamin D – Essential for Your Growing Child

Vitamin D is essential for your child to develop and maintain strong and healthy teeth, muscles and bones. In recent years, vitamin D deficiency has emerged as a health issue in Australian children. As the bulk of our vitamin D comes from exposure to sunlight, it is important to balance the risks of sun exposure with our need for vitamin D.

### How do we get vitamin D?

Most of the vitamin D we need is made in our skin from exposure to the sun's UV radiation. We also get a small amount of vitamin D from food. However, food alone will not provide enough. Normally a child's diet is a supplement to the vitamin D they acquire through sun exposure. Foods that contain vitamin D include: oily fish, such as salmon and sardines; eggs; and other foods that have vitamin D as an additive, notably margarine and some types of milk.

### What happens if you don't have enough vitamin D?

- Children with a vitamin D deficiency might experience muscle weakness, aches and pains, and bone fractures.
- Severe vitamin D deficiency can lead to seizures, growth failure, lethargy, irritability and, for babies, a predisposition to respiratory infections.
- Extreme vitamin D deficiency can cause children to develop rickets, which is a very serious disorder that leads to softened and weakened bones. Rickets most commonly becomes apparent in children aged between 3 and 18 months old.

If you are concerned about your or your child's vitamin D levels, see your GP.

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

- Babies whose mothers are vitamin D deficient.
- People with dark skin, as they require more sun exposure to produce the necessary amount of vitamin D.
- People who have limited sun exposure, including women and children who wear concealing clothing for religious or cultural reasons.

### What can I do to ensure my child gets enough vitamin D?

Unfortunately, there is no precise information on the amount of sun that children need for vitamin D production. SunSmart advises that when UV levels are at or above 3 (you can find daily UV readings at [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au) or the website of the Cancer Council in your state or territory), using sunscreen does not greatly decrease vitamin D levels. When the UV index is at or below 3, you need to balance the need for vitamin D with the importance of being sun safe.

Remember, if you are concerned about your own or your child's vitamin D levels, see your GP for an assessment.

***This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded along with references from [www.econnections.com.au](http://www.econnections.com.au)***

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