

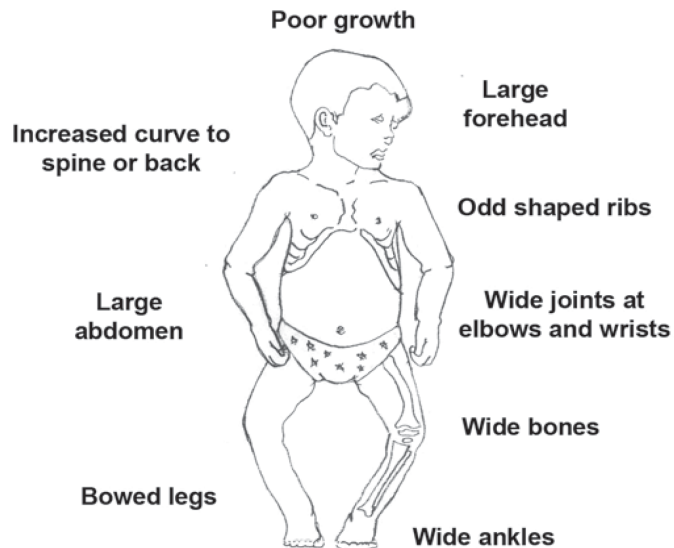
What if I wear clothing that covers most of my body for cultural/religious reasons?

This often makes it hard to get enough sun to make vitamin D. It is therefore recommended that you take extra vitamin D in the form of a supplement; this will benefit both you and your baby.

What are the main long-term effects of not having enough vitamin D?

Women who are vitamin D deficient are at risk of having softer bones that are prone to breaking. Muscles can be weak and sore in severe deficiency.

Children with very low vitamin D levels can develop rickets. This can be serious (see picture). Because the bones don't form normally the child can be short and the legs bowed. Sometimes the calcium level in the blood can be very low and this can lead to the child having seizures (fits).



Does my baby need extra vitamin D?

If you are, or were, vitamin D deficient during your pregnancy you will need to continue to take vitamin D supplementation for another 3-6 months after your baby is born especially while you are breastfeeding.

If your baby requires vitamin D supplementation you will need to discuss this with your doctor or midwife. Do not stop giving the vitamin D supplement to your baby until you have discussed this with your doctor.

For further information

You need to talk to your local doctor, midwife, obstetrician or paediatrician.

Interpreters

If you are attending a hospital or health centre, a free and confidential interpreter service is available to you. Ask staff to arrange an interpreter for you. AUSLAN Interpreters are also available.

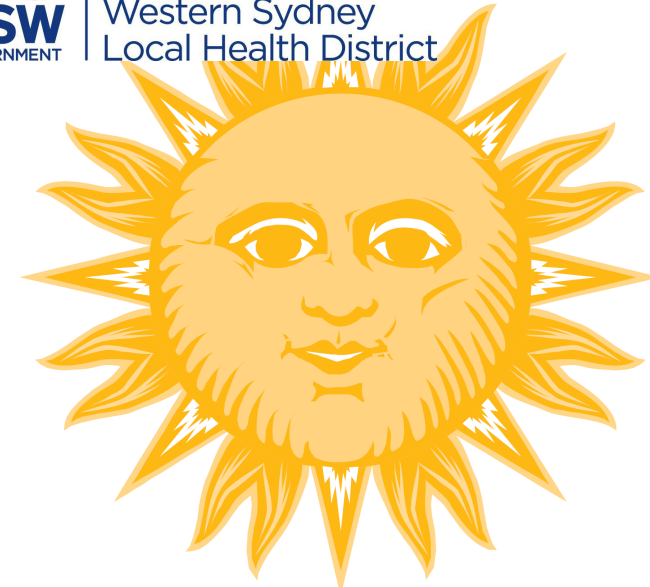
If you are calling from home and you need to arrange an appointment with your GP, midwife or obstetrician, please call the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS) on 131 450.

No Smoking Policy

All WSLHD facilities are smoke free. This means that smoking is not permitted anywhere on the grounds or inside the buildings. For assistance to quit call the Quitline™ on 131 848



Health
Western Sydney
Local Health District



Information about

Vitamin D

for pregnant
Women and
New Mothers

Vitamin D during pregnancy

Vitamin D is a very important vitamin for both mother and baby. You need to make sure your vitamin D levels are normal during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

Low levels of vitamin D are common in pregnant women. This leaflet explains to you how to make sure your vitamin D levels are normal.

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is formed mainly in the skin and then altered in the body to a more active component.

It is a vitamin that is needed in every cell in the body for the body to function properly.

Why is vitamin D important?

- Low levels of vitamin D in children and adults have been linked to the development of many sicknesses.
- A normal level of vitamin D is needed to absorb calcium from food as calcium is vital in building strong bones and teeth and is important for the nervous system. Adequate levels of vitamin D are important for the immune system to work properly.
- A newborn baby's vitamin D level is the same as its mother. So if mother has a low vitamin D level during pregnancy her baby will be born with a low vitamin D level.
- There is very little vitamin D in breast milk. If a baby has vitamin D deficiency they will remain vitamin D deficient while breastfed.

How does my body get vitamin D?

90% of vitamin D is made from sunlight exposure directly (not through glass) onto the skin. Sun block stops vitamin D being made.

Only about 10% of vitamin D comes from food (including oily fish, fortified milk and egg yolks)

How will I know if I have low vitamin D?

A blood test may be done as part of your antenatal assessment at the hospital or through your local doctor.

What can I do if I know I am low in vitamin D?

You will be advised to increase your sun exposure and take extra vitamin D during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. The amount of extra vitamin D needed depends on how low in vitamin D you are. After treatment a follow up blood test will be taken (after 2 to 3 months) to make sure your vitamin D level is normal.

Can taking extra Vitamin D harm my baby or me?

There is no evidence to show that taking supplements in the quantities advised will harm either you or your baby. BUT there is lots of evidence that vitamin D deficient babies can develop serious medical conditions.

What can I do to prevent having low vitamin D levels?

Low vitamin D levels are mainly seen in women who do not get enough sun. To prevent getting low vitamin D levels you need sun exposure to bare skin and, if necessary, to take a vitamin D supplement.

The table below gives an estimate of how long you need to expose your skin to sun per day to make enough vitamin D. The darker your skin, the more sun exposure you need.

	Summer 10am or 3pm	Spring /Autumn 10am or 3pm	Winter 10am or 3pm
Fair skin	10min	20min	30min
Dark skin	30min	60min	90min
Area Exposed	Face, arms and hands	Face, arms and hands	Face, arms, and hands

What about the risk of skin cancer?

Skin cancer due to sun exposure is a concern in Australia, however following advice in the above table should not put you at undue risk. Stay out of direct sunlight in the middle of the day and don't stay in the sun long enough for your skin to become reddened. If you have had skin cancer you need to discuss sun exposure and vitamin D supplementation with your doctor.

How often do I need to take extra vitamin D?

Because you use vitamin D every day, you should take vitamin D supplementation every day while pregnant and breastfeeding if your vitamin D level is low.

Vitamin D is stored in fatty tissue; this may affect the amount of vitamin D supplementation that you will need to take.