

Fact Sheet



Vitamin D and sun exposure

Key points

1. The sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation is both a major cause of skin cancer and the best source of vitamin D.
2. Most people get enough vitamin D by going about their usual daily outdoor activities.
3. Just 10 minutes in the sun on most days of the week in summer, 15–20 minutes in spring and autumn, or 30 minutes in winter, outside peak UV times (10am–2pm or 11am–3pm daylight saving time), will usually give you enough vitamin D.
4. **Always** protect yourself from the sun when the UV Index is 3 (moderate) or above.

Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Around half of all people who spend their life here develop some form of skin cancer. The major cause of skin cancer is ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun.

But the sun's UV rays are also the best source of vitamin D, which we all need for strong and healthy bones. Vitamin D also has other health benefits, with research showing it may protect against some important diseases.

We now know that despite our sunny climate, some Australians who spend little time in the sun may have low levels of vitamin D.

So how can you get enough vitamin D from the sun without increasing your risk of skin cancer?

Where do you get vitamin D?

Almost all vitamin D comes from the sun's UV radiation. We can get a small amount of vitamin D from some foods such as milk, margarine, oily fish and eggs but usually this is not enough to keep us healthy.

Do you need more sun to get enough vitamin D?

Most people usually get enough vitamin D just by going about their daily outdoor activities. But to be sure you're getting enough vitamin D while still being sunsmart, follow these guidelines:

- **Always** protect yourself from the sun when the UV Index is 3 (moderate) or above. The UV Index is a simple way to show the intensity of the sun's UV radiation. When the UV forecast is 3 or above, the UV rays are strong enough to damage your skin. Look out for the UV alert in newspaper, TV and radio weather forecasts. (For more information on the UV Index visit The Cancer Council website www.cancer council.com.au)
- Exposing your face, arms and hands to the sun for 10 minutes in summer, 15–20 minutes in spring and autumn and 30 minutes in winter (outside peak UV times) should give you enough vitamin D.
- During these short times, there's usually no need to worry about sun protection such as wearing sunscreen and a hat unless the UV Index is 3 or above or you are going to be in the sun for a longer period of time.

Keep in mind these tips about sun exposure and vitamin D:

- To get enough vitamin D, you need only to expose about 15% of your body, such as your face, arms and hands. It's not an excuse to sunbake and the best time to get vitamin D is either side of the peak UV period (10am–2pm or 11am–3pm daylight saving time).
- Short bursts in the sun (outside peak UV times) are better for making vitamin D than long periods of exposure.
- Skin cancer is a high risk for all Australians. Deliberately exposing yourself to the sun when the UV Index is 3 or above increases your risk of developing skin cancer.

For information and support call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for the cost of a local call.
Or visit our website www.cancer council.com.au

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Who is at risk of not getting enough vitamin D in Australia?

- The elderly, particularly those who don't go outside very often (older people don't produce vitamin D as well as young people)
- Babies of mothers who have low levels of vitamin D
- People with dark skin who have more melanin (the pigment that turns skin brown after exposure to sunlight and reduces the amount of UV radiation getting through the skin)
- People who cover most of their body and heads with clothing and veils for cultural or religious reasons (less skin is exposed to UV radiation)
- People with prolonged illnesses who stay indoors.

People who have a lack of vitamin D may need to take a supplement and eat foods that are rich in vitamin D, rather than spend more time in the sun.

It is important to remember that a healthy diet, regular exercise and safe exposure to UV radiation are all required for strong and healthy bones. If you are concerned about vitamin D, talk to your doctor or call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

How to protect yourself against skin cancer

Sun protection in a nutshell

Remember – when the UV Index is 3 (moderate) or above:

- Avoid being outside in peak UV times
- Use shade wherever possible
- Wear clothing that covers as much skin as possible
- Wear hats that protect the face, ears and neck
- Wear close-fitting sunglasses that meet the Australian Standard 1067
- Use broad-spectrum, water resistant, SPF30+ sunscreen and reapply it every two hours and after swimming
- Take extra care when out in the sun near highly reflective surfaces like snow or water or when at high altitudes

For more information about vitamin D and sun exposure, visit The Cancer Council website:

www.cancerCouncil.com.au