

Concern over low vitamin D intakes among UK South Asians

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Public health strategies are urgently required to tackle low intakes of vitamin D in the UK South-Asian population, finds a new study in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*.

In the largest study of its kind, using data from the UK Biobank, researchers from the University of Surrey examined the vitamin D intake of UK South Asian adults through diet and supplementation. This population group traditionally has inadequate vitamin D levels due to their darker skin pigmentation, low sun exposure to the skin due to dress coverage and a tendency to avoid the sun.

This makes it even more important that they have adequate oral intake of vitamin D, through diet or supplements.

Examining 8,024 South Asians (Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani) participants, researchers found low intakes of this vital vitamin. In tandem with a lack of sunlight exposure this would put them at increased risk of chronic diseases including osteoporosis, cancer and cardiovascular disease. Vitamin D is vital to our health as it helps regulate the immune and musculoskeletal system.

Researchers found that vitamin D intake through diet was low amongst this group at 1.0-3.0 micrograms per day, but there was a differentiation in ethnicity, with Bangladeshis having on average higher vitamin D intake (3.0mcg) than Indians (1.0mcg). However, all of the groups were below both the European Food Safety Authority recommendation (15

micrograms per day) and the Public Health England recommendation (10 micrograms per day), which is needed to ensure adequate health in adults.

Vitamin D supplementation use, which is a good way of increasing vitamin D levels in the body, was also low amongst UK South Asians, with only 22 per cent of Bangladeshis, 32 per cent of Indians and 25 per cent of Pakistanis taking a vitamin D containing supplement.

Within this group, women (39 per cent) were more likely to take supplements than men (23 per cent).

Surprisingly researchers discovered a geographic and socio economic distinction in vitamin D intake in South Asians. It was found that South Asians in Greater London had a higher prevalence of vitamin D intake (35 percent) than those in other regions (18-28 percent).

Lead author Dr. Andrea Darling, from the Department of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Surrey, said: "Such low levels of vitamin D intake and [vitamin](#) D supplement use in this population group is very concerning. Vitamin D is crucial to ensuring our overall [health](#) and a lack of it leads to an increased risk of chronic illnesses putting an additional strain on the NHS.

"Urgent steps are required to remedy this problem and avoid a [public health](#) crisis amongst UK South Asians."

More information: Andrea L Darling et al, Vitamin D supplement use and associated demographic, dietary and lifestyle factors in 8024 South Asians aged 40–69 years: analysis of the UK Biobank cohort, *Public Health Nutrition* (2018). [DOI: 10.1017/S1368980018001404](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980018001404)

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