

How to get vitamin D without spending too much time in the sun

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Vitamin D is vital for numerous bodily functions. While sunlight is the primary source of vitamin D, record high temperatures this summer may dissuade people from spending time in the sun. An expert at Baylor

College of Medicine talks about the importance of vitamin D and alternatives ways to get your daily intake.

"Vitamin D is important for bone health, [calcium](#) absorption, reduction of inflammation, promoting cell growth and immune and cardiovascular support," said Dr. Mike Ren, assistant professor of family and community medicine at Baylor. "People can have vitamin D deficiency for a few months and be fine, but prolonged low levels can cause bone and thyroid health to deteriorate."

We get vitamin D when [ultraviolet rays](#) shine on the skin, prompting the body to create vitamin D₃, which the liver and kidneys then turn into the usable vitamin D. Although people prefer to spend more time indoors to beat the heat during the summer, Ren says only about 10 to 30 minutes of daily direct sunlight exposure is necessary to ensure vitamin production. Sunscreen and protective clothing can prevent sunlight absorption; however, it is uncommon for these safety measures to severely impact vitamin D production.

"You don't need to go outside and bake to get your daily sunlight intake. Just take a few minutes out of your day to get some physical activity in the sun," he said.

The body also absorbs vitamin D from foods. Ren says that people with a well-balanced diet typically get the necessary amount of vitamin D. People with a deficiency can consume more fatty fish, lean proteins and eggs to compensate. Some dairy products are even be fortified with vitamin D for those needing more in their diet.

Over-the-counter vitamin D supplements can also help those working second shift or who live in environments where sunlight is limited.

"People can have different ailments that prevent them from getting

vitamin D from food or sunlight so it's important for people to be aware of all their options," said Ren. "It doesn't matter where you're getting your vitamin D from either. Whether it be a combination of sun and diet or purely from supplements, all forms of intake can work."

Ren advises people to get their vitamin D levels checked at their annual checkups. People with low vitamin D levels will initially be asymptomatic but annual testing can reveal deficiencies that may be indicators of kidney or parathyroid diseases.

"If there is a serious vitamin D deficiency, your health care provider can put you on a care plan that involves prescribed supplements that have higher concentrations compared to over-the-counter [supplements](#)," Ren said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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