

# Be sure to get enough of the 'sunshine vitamin' this winter

January 15 2024, by Robin Foster

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In the middle of winter when sunshine can be hard to come by, it's tough to get enough vitamin D, but one expert has some advice.

"Vitamin D is well known to support [bone health](#), but it also plays a role in the health of your heart as well as your GI tract. It is tougher to get it [in the winter] because a lot of the absorption and how the [vitamin](#) gets transformed to a usable substance in our bodies is from the sun," explained Dr. Mike Ren, an assistant professor in Baylor College of Medicine's Department of Family and Community Medicine.

"You need the sun high in the sky, not when it's rising or about to set, for your body to effectively absorb sunlight to absorb the vitamin D."

Although vitamin D is found naturally in fatty fishes and seafood, it is not typically found in other foods, so people often don't get enough vitamin D from their diet, Ren said.

So, most folks need to get outside in the sun, even when the temperatures plummet.

"The typical adult needs 800 international units of vitamin D per day, which roughly translates to 15 to 30 minutes of good, [direct sunlight](#)," Ren said in a Baylor news release. "There is no need to put on a bathing suit just to get sun. You can be fully clothed with the sun shining on your face or hands for sufficient exposure. Make sure to get your sun exposure during peak sunlight and not at sunrise or sunset."

If that's not possible and you find yourself indoors for most of the day, Ren recommends taking an over-the-counter vitamin D supplement.

"If you take supplements, you need more than the recommended 800 international units per day because you're not going to absorb 100% of that supplement, so get 5,000 international units as the baseline," he said. "It's a supplement, and it's safe to take. If there is a little excess, your body will excrete it out."

Getting enough vitamin D can prove to be even more challenging for some.

Those who get [weight-loss surgery](#) often see a decrease in their ability to absorb vitamin D, and these folks might need more supplements than the [average person](#), Ren said. People with [cystic fibrosis](#) or kidney and [liver disease](#) also have absorption issues, and he suggested they get their

vitamin D levels checked and consider further supplementation.

Just how important is vitamin D to your health?

Also known as the "sunshine vitamin," it helps with calcium absorption and bone health, but recent studies have also shown links between vitamin D and heart health, as well as vitamin D and low cancer risk, Ren noted.

"Some new studies are also finding that vitamin D is important for proper muscle function, like your constantly [beating heart](#), as well as lower risk of getting a variety of cancers," he said. "These are new studies, so I don't want to overestimate their importance, but on the flip side, I don't want people to trivialize it and say it's not important."

**More information:** Visit Harvard for more on [vitamin D](#).

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