

How Can Our Kids Get Enough Vitamin D?



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The journal *Pediatrics* (11/09) reports that one-fifth of children aged 1 to 11 do not receive adequate vitamin D. For children with darker skin, the numbers are much higher - up to 80 percent of Hispanic children and 92 percent of non-Hispanic black children do not get enough vitamin D. This puts kids at risk for rickets, a disease that weakens bones. Rickets, rarely seen in the U.S. for 100 years, has reappeared.

Vitamin D is found in only a few foods and is manufactured through the skin from sun exposure. Its important benefits include regulating calcium and phosphorus for bone health. It is also linked to increased athletic performance and lower risk of cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Pediatricians recommend that children get 400 IU (international units) of vitamin D daily.

Typically, we receive our daily allowance from sunshine and vitamin D-fortified milk. However, many people do not: those with darker skin pigmentation, those in areas with less sunshine, and those who avoid dairy.

Here are some key sources of vitamin D:

1. Sun exposure - ten to fifteen minutes two times a week
2. Salmon or mackerel - 3.5 ounces, cooked (350 IU)
3. Sardines or tuna - 2 to 3 ounces canned in oil (over 200 IU)
4. Fortified foods - milk, margarine, and cereals are vitamin D-fortified; read nutrition labels
5. Egg yolks - one egg (20 IU)

For picky kids, remember that these foods can be worked into meals. Mix fish into a tasty macaroni salad. Use milk in pudding or make chocolate or strawberry milk. Getting the right amount of vitamin D is worth the extra creativity!



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