

Vitamin D for Breastfed Babies

Babies need vitamin D for healthy growth and development. Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium. Calcium and vitamin D work together to help babies build strong, healthy bones and teeth. Breastmilk is naturally low in vitamin D.

Vitamin D Deficiency

Babies who don't get enough vitamin D can develop a deficiency. If the levels are low enough, they are at risk of getting rickets, a disease that affects the way bones grow and develop. Infants and children with rickets may have muscle spasms or a much slower development in sitting up and crawling. Rickets causes bones to be soft and these children can develop bowed legs, an enlarged skull or an abnormal curve in the spine.

Babies are most at risk of vitamin D deficiency if:

- They have darker skin.
- They live in northern communities.
- Their mothers don't have enough vitamin D.
- They receive breastmilk.



Vitamin D Supplements for Baby

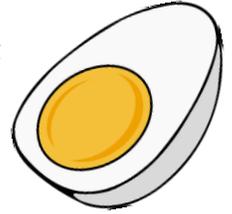
All babies who receive breastmilk, regardless of how often, should get a vitamin D supplement every day. 400 IU (international units) or (10 micrograms) of vitamin D is the recommended daily dose from birth until 2 years of age. In some situations, healthcare providers may recommend up to 800 IU or (20 micrograms) per day. Liquid vitamin D supplements are available in pharmacies and grocery stores. The amount to give baby varies between one drop and 1 ml, depending on the amount in the supplement. Choose a supplement that is meant for babies. Read the instructions carefully to be sure you give your baby the right amount. If you are unsure, talk to a pharmacist.

Vitamin D Supplements for Parents

It is important for the breastfeeding parent to have foods rich in vitamin D and to consider taking a vitamin D supplement for the health of their own teeth and bones. Very high doses of vitamin D supplements may increase vitamin D in breastmilk, but more research is needed to ensure safety. Even when the breastfeeding parent takes a vitamin D supplement, it is still recommended that vitamin D supplements be given directly to babies.

Sources of Vitamin D in the Diet for the Older Baby and Breastfeeding Parents:

- Cow's milk (may introduce to baby at 9-12 months)
- Fortified soy beverages (may introduce after 24 months)
- Fatty fish, such as salmon & mackerel (may introduce at about 6 months)
- Eggs (may introduce at about 6 months)
- Fortified yogurts (may introduce at about 6 months)
- Margarine (may introduce after 6 months)



Vitamin D and Sunlight

Vitamin D is often referred to as the 'sunshine vitamin' because it forms when skin is exposed to sunlight (UVB rays). Age, skin colour, latitude, season, and time of day affect how much vitamin D is made in the skin. Exposure to UV (ultraviolet) rays, however, can lead to skin cancer, skin damage, sunburns and eye damage. Babies under one year of age should be kept out of direct sunlight. Enjoy the sun safely by covering baby up with clothing that covers as much skin as possible or UV protective clothing. Use unbreakable, close-fitting/wrap-around UV 400 or 100% UV protection sunglasses. Apply SPF 30 or more sunscreen, labelled "broad spectrum" and "water resistant" to baby once they are 6 months of age, avoiding the mouth and eye areas.

References:

Canadian Pediatric Society (2021). *Vitamin D*. Caring for Kids.
https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/vitamin_d

Marrett, L. D., Chu, M. B., Atkinson, J., Nuttall, R., Bromfield, G., Hershfield, L., & Rosen, C. F. (2016). An update to the recommended core content for sun safety messages for public education in Canada: a consensus report. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 107(4-5): e473-e9. doi: 10.17269/CJPH.107.5556

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