

Vitamin D and calcium in pregnancy and breastfeeding

Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium from food. It also helps the body maintain muscle and bone strength. Calcium helps to develop our bones and keep them strong.

How do I get Vitamin D?

Our main source of vitamin D is from the sun. It is hard to measure how much sunlight a person needs to absorb enough vitamin D as it is different for every person. This is because the amount of vitamin D absorbed depends on the time of day, time spent in the sun and skin colour.

Vitamin D can be found in some foods, but only in very small amounts.

The table below explains how much time in the sun is needed to absorb enough Vitamin D.

Months in Victoria	Fair to olive skin	Naturally very dark skin
September to April	<p>About 10 minutes of sunlight exposure each day, on the face, arms and hands (or equivalent area of bare skin) before 10am and after 3pm.</p> <p>To reduce the chances of skin cancer and eye damage always wear protection with clothing, a hat and sunscreen between 10am-3pm during these months.</p>	You will need 3-6 times longer in the sun than those with lighter skin.
May to August	<p>Approximately 2-3 hours sun exposure per week to the face, arms and hands (or equivalent area of bare skin).</p> <p>Sun protection is recommended in areas where the sun reflection is high such as water and snow.</p>	<p>You will need 3-6 times longer in the sun than those with lighter skin.</p> <p>You may need more time in the sun or supplementation.</p>

What if I have a low vitamin D level?

We recommend you have your vitamin D level tested when you are pregnant. If your level is low, you will be advised to take vitamin D tablets and to safely increase your sunlight exposure. The basic dose for supplementation if you are deficient (under **75 nmol/L**) is **2,000 international units**. Your doctor or midwife will discuss this with you.

If your level is low, your baby's level will also be low. Baby's need vitamin D and calcium to help develop their muscles and bones. If your level is still low when you give birth and you are breastfeeding, we recommend your baby have a vitamin D supplement. This can be given to your baby to swallow and lasts for four months. If you are fully breastfeeding when your baby is four months old, we recommend you discuss ongoing vitamin D supplements for your baby with your Maternal and Child Health Nurse or GP.

Calcium

Calcium is needed during pregnancy for yourself and your baby. Calcium comes in many foods, especially dairy products. It is recommended women have 1000mg of calcium every day. The table below shows how much calcium is in some foods.

Food	Serving Size	Calcium (mg)
Rump steak (lean)	100g	5
Apples	1 medium (156g)	7
Lamb chop (lean)	100g	8
Bread – mixed grain	30g (slice)	15
Bread– wholemeal	30g (slice)	16
Chicken roasted no skin	100g	16
Broccoli	60g	18
Strawberries	1 cup (145g)	19
Eggs – boiled	1 large (48g)	21
Baked beans	100g	34
Oranges	1 medium (122g)	35
Apricots – dried	50g	35
Spinach	100g	50
Tahini	20g (1 tbsp)	65
Custard	100g	100
Almonds	50g	110
Ice cream	100g	133
Tofu (calcium set)	100g	150
Salmon – tinned red	100g	220
Sardines – tinned	100g	380
Cheese	40g (piece)	300
Cheddar (reduced fat)	40g (2 slices)	323
Cheddar cheese	40g (2 slices)	327
Parmesan cheese	40g (piece)	460
Haloumi cheese	40g (piece)	248
Yogurt – flavoured	200g (std tub)	316
Yogurt – plain	200g (std tub)	390
Milk – reduced fat	250mL (std glass)	352
Milk – regular 250mL	250mL (std glass)	285
Milk – skim	250mL (std glass)	320
Milk – calcium fortified	250mL (std glass)	353

Osteoporosis Australia. Website: <http://www.osteoporosis.org.au/>

Not all tofu is set with calcium – check the nutrition panel to make sure the product contains calcium.