

TALBOT GREEN GROUP PRACTICE

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Email: practice.manager.W95036@wales.nhs.uk

Please reply to Talbot Green Beddau

Dear Patient,

We now have the results of your recent blood test. This shows that your **Vitamin D** levels are low (insufficient range).

Symptoms of vitamin D insufficiency include muscle ache, fatigue, and bone pain.

I am enclosing a leaflet on vitamin D insufficiency below. Within the leaflet it discusses how to manage this condition.

We do not need to check your vitamin D levels again; however, it is recommended that you increase your vitamin D intake either via over-the-counter medications (OTC), or through your diet. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the practice.

Yours sincerely,

Talbot Green Group Practice

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Patient Information: Vitamin D Insufficiency

What is Vitamin D?

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, which is also known as coledalciferol.

In humans Vitamin D is unique because it is mainly made by the body in response to sunlight on the skin (as Vitamin D₃) and it is also available from some food sources.

Why do we need vitamin D?

Vitamin D is activated by the body in the kidneys. It regulates the concentration of calcium and phosphate in the bloodstream, promoting the healthy growth of bone. Adequate Vitamin D levels are needed to prevent rickets in children and osteomalacia (bone softening) in children and adults.

Together with calcium, it also helps to protect older adults from osteoporosis. In addition, vitamin D also is important for nerve & muscle function, inflammation, and effects genes that regulate the growth of cells.

Risks factors for Vitamin D insufficiency?

Vitamin D insufficiency means your vitamin D level is on the lower end of normal and may be insufficient for your bodies needs.

This can happen because

- **The body has a high vitamin D requirement.** For example vitamin D insufficiency is more likely in those who have had multiple pregnancies, with short gaps between pregnancies.
- **The body is unable to make enough vitamin from the effect of sunlight on the skin.** This is because the UK generally has less hours of sun light than other countries and if you are house bound you may not be getting sufficient sunlight exposure
- **Not enough vitamin D is taken in the diet** for example a vegetarian or fish free diet.

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- Some **medical conditions** affect the way the body handles vitamin D. For example patients with Crohn's disease, coeliac disease, liver or kidney disease are all at risk of vitamin D insufficiency, as they may not be absorbing the vitamin correctly.
- Certain **drug treatments can affect vitamin D levels** examples include: Carbamazepine, phenytoin, primidone, and some anti-HIV medicines. Ask your pharmacist if you want more information.

How can I increase my vitamin D?

Go out into the sun: 2-3 exposures of sunlight on bare skin per week from April to September should be enough to last through the year. Each episode should be 20-30 minutes to bare arms and face and should not cause redness or sunburn.

It is difficult to get enough vitamin D from food alone. However it is contained naturally in:

- Oily fish, such as Salmon, Mackerel, Sardines, Tuna, and fish liver oils, such as cod liver oil.
- Whole egg
- Beef liver
- The only vegan sources of vitamin D are mushrooms and UV-irradiated yeast.

Some foods are artificially fortified with vitamin D such as margarine, fat spreads and some breakfast cereals.

Look out for the RDA (Recommended Daily Amount) of Vitamin D on food packaging. Because the amount of vitamin D made by the body varies greatly between person to person, this often assumes that all of a person's vitamin D is from their diet and that none is made by the body in response to sun exposure.

Consider taking Vitamin D Supplements: If your doctor has identified that you have risk factors for Vitamin D insufficiency, you may want to consider purchasing your own supply of Vitamin D from health food shops or pharmacies.

The strength or dose you will need is **400 units of Vitamin D daily, or 1000 units every other day (as this is often cheaper)**. If the doctor advises you to take a different dose of Vitamin D daily, ask your local pharmacist or health food store to advise you on a suitable product.

We recommend you take this dose from October to April, and get sufficient sun light exposure from April to September.

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If you have any of the risk factors listed in the “**Risks factors for Vitamin D insufficiency?**” section above, then we recommend taking over the counter vitamin D tablets (400 units) every day for the whole year.

There are however exceptions to this rule. If you suffer from chronic kidney disease (CKD), high calcium levels or sarcoidosis or TB, then we recommend discussing this with your specialist doctor first.

Remember to discuss this with your local pharmacist to ensure you are not already on medications which contain vitamin D.

We also recommend checking to ensure you are having enough calcium in your diet. This can be done by using the osteoporosis foundation calculator:
<https://www.osteoporosis.foundation/educational-hub/topic/calcium-calculator>

Summary

The following points summarise the advice around what you can do to improve your health and vitamin D levels:

- Increase your exposure to sunlight to advised levels e.g. while walking to the shops or taking the children to school. If you don't want to expose your face and arms in public, try to sit outside in private for a short time each day
- Look at your diet and consider changes you can make to increase the food groups that are high in Vitamin D levels
- Purchase a Vitamin D supplement, as outlined above.

If you have worsening symptoms of vitamin D insufficiency such as bone or muscle pain, or tenderness, make an appointment to see your doctor, as we will take a thorough history and consider putting you on vitamin D treatment doses.