



nutrition

by Virginia Harry

Don't let the sun go down on you this winter!

I don't know about you, but I dread the winter. I must have been a squirrel or a groundhog in a previous existence, because as soon as the clocks change, all I want to do is curl up under the duvet and have someone wake me with a nice cuppa and a digestive biscuit around April. Sadly, my mortgage contract doesn't have a hibernation clause, and my mortgage payments don't allow me to spend 6 months of the year on holiday in more temperate climes. So I have to rely on my 'sunshine in a bottle' – vitamin D.


...as many as a quarter of Britons are vitamin D deficient in the winter...

Food sources of vitamin D

Unfortunately, vitamin D is present in very few foods. You can find it in prawns and good old oily fish (all that Omega 3 to keep your skin supple and your joints lubricated throughout the winter!) – sardines, mackerel, salmon, and eggs. Some milk and cereal products are fortified with it, too. But that's probably not enough.

Supplementation

Nutritionists agree that, to get a significant therapeutic effect from vitamin D, doses of at least 10,000iu are appropriate. After all, the body can absorb around 20,000iu from the sun per day. There are two forms of vitamin D – D2 (ergocalciferol) and D3 (cholecalciferol), with the former being derived from yeast and therefore suitable for vegans, and the latter from animal sources. I take my vitamin D in liquid form, but you can take tablets if you prefer. Because it's fat soluble, you're likely to absorb more of it when you take it with your biggest meal of the day.

Finally... can too much be toxic? There's no evidence to suggest that moderate doses of vitamin D are toxic unless you've been taking around 40,000iu per day for a long time. So don't! Take a high quality brand of D3 in doses between 10,000 – 20,000iu per day. This way you can generate your own internal sun lamp this season. 

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If you do suffer from winter depression, do consider having your vitamin D blood levels assessed. Ideally, levels of this should be above 35 nanograms per ml (87 nanomoles per litre).

D for diversity

As well as giving you 'sunshine on a cloudy day', vitamin D plays a fundamental role in calcium absorption. Together these nutrients help protect older adults from osteoporosis. Vitamin D has also been found to play a major role in breast and bowel cancer treatment, regulating and controlling the growth and spread of malignant cells. It can help with other conditions as diverse as diabetes, heart disease, joint disease, MS, dementia, birth difficulties and autism. And it even protects us from flu by dampening down the immune system! It's particularly helpful in winter, when there are more viral infections around.

So you need it. If you're an indoor person, or are – rightfully – wary of too much sun exposure, or it's winter, how do you get enough?



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