

WELLBEING

SUNNY D

Vitamin D can help combat winter sadness and depression, but we need sunlight to make it. With shorter days looming the chances are you need to add a daily supplement of this vital vitamin to your diet

Whether they last a day, a week or a whole month, health awareness campaigns are a useful way to shine a spotlight on medical issues and recently, vital vitamin D joined the list of these hot health topics. Timed to coincide with the end of British Summer Time, National Vitamin D Awareness Week 2015 is on from now until 25 October to highlight the important role the nutrient plays in keeping us healthy, along with the message that supplements of it are essential for some people.

Current Department of Health guidelines recommend that those in certain at-risk groups – among them pregnant women, babies and children under five and the over-65s – should take a daily vitamin D supplement to safeguard against deficiency. Now, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) has proposed going further, recommending that all Britons aged four and over take a look at supplements.

We get vitamin D from two sources: sunlight and diet. For most people the former is the main source; the trouble is, the UK's climate, combined with the need to protect our skin with SPF's that also block vitamin D, means we are not getting sufficient exposure. This is particularly true of children, who often choose indoor pursuits such as computer games over playing outside, even when it is sunny.

So what about diet? It is true that certain foods are rich sources of vitamin D. Types of oily fish, eggs, fortified cereals, sweet potato, fortified milk powders and some cheeses contain vitamin D, but it is tricky to get the amount you need from

food alone. In fact, the SACN estimates that most people's daily dietary intake of vitamin D is only half of what it should be.

This shortfall matters because vitamin D supports immune function, the absorption of calcium, muscle strength and function, and is also thought to play a vital role in memory, mood and brain function. It can help combat winter sadness and depression and is now key in research into inflammation in the body and the role this plays in many major diseases,

including heart disease and cancers.

According to research published in the *British Medical Journal*, more than half of UK adults have insufficient levels of vitamin D during winter and spring thanks to our weather. Furthermore, nearly 50 per cent of us are un-aware of the need to take vitamin D supplements during the gloomier months.

This is especially important for children, as Dr Benjamin Jacobs, consultant paediatrician and director of children's services at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital explains:

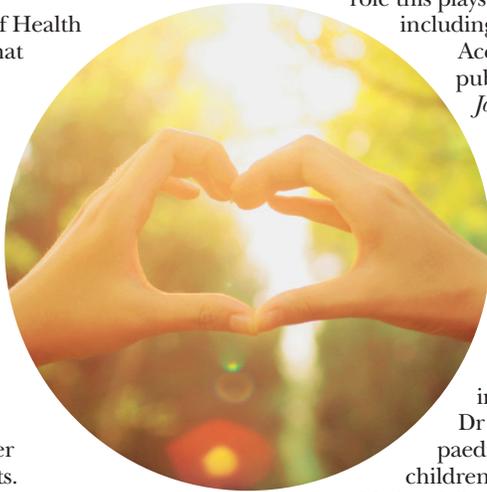
"I've noticed a big increase in children suffering vitamin D deficiency in the past decade and we are now seeing rickets in children again.

"As doctors we've campaigned to avoid sunshine to prevent skin cancer, but we should add to the message, 'Take vitamin D some other way; take a supplement or fortify your food.' We shouldn't be seeing children with a lack of vitamin D in this day and age."

Nutritionist Lisa Strong is another advocate of supplementation. "People are unaware of their vitamin D deficiency," she says. "But there is a blood test available. Symptoms include tiredness,

crankiness, depression and high blood pressure. It is estimated that 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 6 children are vitamin D deficient. That is 10 million people in the UK and 1 billion in the world. The good news is that there are now lots of ways to supplement vitamin D into your diet, such as a mouth spray or vitamin drink." ■

• For more information visit vitamindawarenessweek.co.uk



TOP-UP TIPS

Although it is possible to source the recommended vitamin D intake from your diet, you should also aim to soak up direct sunlight for at least 30 minutes a day. If this is not an option in winter, a vitamin D3 supplement is essential to plug the gap. Try:

- Get More Vitamin D Still Mango & Passionfruit, £1.45, from Tesco and Asda. A sugar-free fruit-flavoured drink that is fortified with vitamin D; visit moredrinks.co.uk
- Better You Dlux 3000, £7.95, a daily oral spray available from Holland & Barrett and betteryou.com
- Boots Pharmaceuticals Vitamin D 25 ug 180 Tablets, £8.99
- Holland & Barrett Fast Acting Liquid Vitamin D3 Drops, £6.99



HEALTH NOTES



• **Be a sport** BBC Get Inspired has joined forces with #BigHelpOut to try to enlist 10,000 new volunteers for local sports clubs. Visit joininuk.org/bighelpout to team up with such sports stars as like Rebecca Adlington (above) and Dave Moorcroft and help get the nation fit.



• Temperature control

Want to stay hydrated all day but also want to ensure your favourite drink remains cool – or hot – on the go? Bobble Insulate, £29.99, promises to keep beverages chilled for up to 24 hours, or hot for up to 12 hours, and comes in six colours. For sale at Harvey Nichols from 1 December.



• **Band aid** More than 2,000 vulnerable people in care homes or hospitals died of dehydration or malnutrition between 2003 and 2012. To help tackle this shocking statistic, Snowdrop Care has secured the design rights to the innovative Hydrate Me wristband, which helps caregivers recognise those who are at risk. Visit snowdropcare.com to buy bands, £2 each.