



THE BRITISH DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

The Professional Association for Registered Dietitians
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M e d i a R e l e a s e

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Dietitians Demand Action on the Supply of Vitamins for At-risk Groups

Despite the current brighter weather and predictions of a warmer autumn, the lack of sunshine over the summer months could lead to young children, pregnant and breastfeeding mums and older people lacking essential Vitamin D. The British Dietetic Association is now calling for action to make essential vitamin supplements more widely available for at-risk groups.

With only 464 hours of sunshine during the summer – seven percent less than average - dietitians are warning that a lack of the so-called ‘sunshine vitamin’ may increase the risk of fits in babies, rickets in toddlers and chronic health conditions, such as heart disease, multiple sclerosis and some cancers, amongst the most vulnerable adults

According to the British Dietetic Association (BDA) even a healthy and well-balanced diet, which provides all the other vitamins and nutrients, is unlikely to provide enough vitamin D. However, Vitamin D-only supplements are not widely available and, in some parts of the country, parents seeking to protect their children from Vitamin D deficiency are often unable to access the NHS Healthy Start vitamin drops recommended for babies from about 6 months up to 5 years.

By definition, a vitamin is a nutrient that is not made in the body, but Vitamin D is actually an important hormone and it rarely occurs naturally in food. Recent studies have linked the sunshine vitamin with good bone health and a healthy immune system as well as lessening the risk of many chronic illnesses.

Paediatric dietitian and BDA spokesperson, Jacqui Lowdon says: “Sunshine, not food, is the best source of Vitamin D and normally time spent outside with some bare skin during the summer months April to September is sufficient to boost the body’s stores of vitamin D in time for the darker months ahead when sunrays reaching the UK are not strong enough for skin to make vitamin D.

“There is a very real risk from having insufficient Vitamin D, especially for babies and young children, who are growing quickly. Dietitians are already seeing rising cases of rickets in some areas of the UK.

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“Pregnant women, breastfeeding mums and older people also need to make sure that they are getting enough Vitamin D, and this is one of the few cases where dietitians and the Department of Health recommend taking a supplement for those at risk.”

Vitamin D is available as part of the NHS Healthy Start children's vitamin drops (containing Vitamins A, D and C) which are available for babies and young children at some, but not all, NHS health clinics. Healthy Start vitamins for women contain vitamins D, C and folic acid and are ideal for pregnancy, while breastfeeding and for all women who may become pregnant. They should be available in all pharmacies but unfortunately not all pharmacies choose to stock and recommend them. Vitamin D is included in broad-spectrum one-a-day multivitamin supplements (but in smaller amounts), and in calcium supplements prescribed by your GP to prevent or treat osteoporosis.

Jacqui continues “Nutritional supplements sales are sky high, but in practice they are often taken by the worried-well rather than those who actually need them. Whilst we should all look to improve dietary intake for general good nutrition, those at high risk should seek the views of a trained registered dietitian for advice on taking supplements.”

The BDA is calling for action in the following ways:

- NHS Healthy Start Children's vitamin drops should be made available from all Primary Care Trusts either through their health centres or via an arrangement with local pharmacies. The Director of Public Health in each PCT should ensure the PCT makes them widely available and accessible to all families with under fives.
- All retail pharmacies should stock and recommend the NHS Healthy Start vitamins for women to all pregnant women, breastfeeding mums and any women who might become pregnant.
- The Department of Health needs to consider making available a suitable 10mcg supplement of vitamin D for older adults.

The British Dietetic Association has produced fact sheets on Vitamin D, and also on vitamin supplements for babies and children. These can be viewed on downloaded and printed free from www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

Media enquiries to The British Dietetic Association and requests for interviews should be directed to our media hotline on 0870 850 2517 or pr@bda.uk.com.

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Website: <http://www.bda.uk.com>

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with nearly 6,000 members. About two-thirds of members are employed in the National Health Service. The remaining members work in education, industry, research, sport settings or freelance.
2. Registered dietitians hold the only legally-recognisable graduate qualification in nutrition and dietetics. They are experts in interpreting and translating the science of nutrition into practical ways of promoting nutritional well-being, disease treatment and the prevention of nutrition-related problems. Their advice is sound and based on current scientific evidence. Registration, awarded by the Health Professionals Council, is an indication that a dietitian is fit to practise and is working within an agreed statement of conduct. For further details about the British Dietetic Association, please visit our website: www.bda.uk.com.
3. Healthy Start vitamins should be available through NHS health clinics, through children's centres and directly from health care professionals as well as in retail pharmacies. They are free for Healthy Start beneficiaries and some English PCTs provide Healthy Start vitamins free of charge for all pregnant and breastfeeding women and under fives.
4. Healthy Start vitamins are available in England, Scotland and Wales, but are currently not available in Northern Ireland.
5. Foods that contain Vitamin D include:

Oily fish such as salmon, sardines, pilchards, trout and kippers are the only foods which naturally contain reasonable amounts of Vitamin D.

- Cod liver oil contains a lot of Vitamin D (but is not advised for pregnant women due to high vitamin A concentrations)
- Eggs and meat contain small amounts.
- Margarine, one or two breakfast cereals, some yogurts and all infant formula have added Vitamin D.