

MEDIA ALERT

Vitamin D: Time to take action?

With all the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring robust and healthy immune systems within the population is vital at every level, from individual wellbeing, through to national health strategy.

Six months in, observational evidence on vitamin D and coronavirus continues to mount, with research suggesting that it might impact on susceptibility to the virus, on severity of outcomes, and may contribute to differences in ethnic predispositions.

There is now a call to action from parts of the scientific community to raise awareness of the importance of vitamin D, to urgently further study its potential use in the nutritional management of immune health, and to implement widespread health strategies to safeguard against vitamin D deficiency.

UK Vitamin D deficiency: Supplementary needs

- Early into lockdown, Public Health England updated its advice and recommended that everyone should take a 10 microgram supplement of vitamin D. NHS advice was also updated and the positive consumer response caused an unprecedented upturn in demand for vitamin D supplements in the UK ⁽ⁱ⁾
- The UK has one of the **highest levels of deficiency across Europe**, estimated to affect up to 1/4 of the population, and rising to 1/3 in winter (ii). As well as in the elderly, Vitamin D deficiency has been found to occur more frequently in those with diabetes and obesity ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ Studies have identified that the **BAME** population, who were notably affected by COVID-19, are a risk group for vitamin D deficiency ^(iv)
- Researchers have highlighted that staying indoors because of lockdown may have predisposed some individuals to even greater risk of vitamin D deficiency this year ^(v)

Vitamin D: Recent evidence

The latest study by Boston University ^(vi) found:

- People with vitamin D deficiency have a 54% higher COVID-19 positivity rate
- Patients older than 40 who had sufficient levels of vitamin D were more 51% less likely to die from the virus
- Patients who had a daily dose of vitamin D were less likely to experience complications
- Rates of severe illness were 13% lower in vitamin D-sufficient patients and intubation was 46% less common

Vitamin D: How much is enough?

Whilst general public health advice to take 10 micrograms daily to safeguard against deficiency is a valued national recommendation, there is a stirring in the scientific community about whether higher supplementary intakes should be recommended, particularly for people who are vitamin D deficient, and when the safe upper limit for supplementation is much higher at 75 micrograms daily. ^(vii)

This gives allowance for individual requirements, which research is now showing varies not only according to diet, but also lifestyle, ethnicity, weight and health conditions. As research delves deeper into the role of vitamin D in immune function, so interest increases. Vitamin D very well could be **the nutrient of the decade**.

Media statements from The Health Food Manufacturers Association

“Vitamin D is an essential nutrient known for decades to help support the health of the bones and muscles. It is also known that Vitamin D has a positive role in immune function, and that deficiency might compromise immune health. This is pivotal at a time when protecting public

health is paramount”, says Dr Michele Sadler, Scientific Advisor to the Health Food Manufacturers’ Association.

“The latest findings taken from a robust observational study provide further rationale to explore the role of vitamin D supplementation and undertake more research. Better communication of the advice on vitamin D supplementation is a potentially cost-effective way to improve the vitamin D status of the population” Says Graham Keen, Executive Director at the Health Food Manufacturers’ Association

ENDS

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The HFMA

The Health Food Manufacturers’ Association (HFMA) is the voice of the UK’s natural health industry and represents around 130 manufacturers and suppliers of natural health products.

Founded in 1965, the HFMA is a not-for-profit organisation which operates long-standing codes of practice to ensure that member companies adhere to high standards and offer good quality, safe products supported by responsible, lawful information. For further information about the HFMA, visit www.hfma.co.uk.

The HFMA recently launched the [HealthyDoesIt](#) campaign to empower individuals to live healthier lives within their local community.

References:

- (i) NHS Vitamin D, Public Health England supplementary advice: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>
- (ii) NICE. 2018. Vitamin D deficiency in adults - treatment and prevention. See <https://cks.nice.org.uk/vitamin-d-deficiency-in-adults-treatment-and-prevention>
- (iii) The Royal Society 2020. Vitamin D and Covid-19. Rapid Review June 2020
- (iv) Wier, E.K, Thenappan T, Bhargava M& Chen Y. 2020. “Does vitamin D deficiency increase the severity of COVID-19?”. Clinical medicine (London, England), vol. 20. No.4, pp. e107-e108
- (v) Rhodes, J.M., Subramanian, S., Laird, E., Griffin, G & Kenny, R.A, 2020, “Perspective: Vitamin D deficiency and COVID-19 severity - plausibly linked by latitude, ethnicity, impacts on cytokines, ACE2 and thrombosis”, Journal of Internal Medicine.
- (vi) Vitamin D sufficiency, a serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D at least 30 ng/mL reduced risk for adverse clinical outcomes in patients with COVID-19 infection. Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0239799>
- (vii) 75mcg upper limit REFERENCE: FSAI 2020. Guidance for Food Businesses: The Safety of Vitamins and Minerals in Food Supplements.