

Who is at risk of vitamin D deficiency?

Most Australians get enough exposure to sunlight to get enough vitamin D to form and maintain healthy bones. However, some Tasmanians and certain sections of the community are at more risk of vitamin D deficiency.

These include:

- Naturally dark-skinned people who need more UV exposure to produce adequate levels of vitamin D as the pigment in their skin reduces UV penetration
- People who cover their skin for religious or cultural reasons
- Elderly people or those who are housebound or in institutional care
- Babies and infants of vitamin D-deficient mothers, especially babies exclusively or partially breastfed
- Patients with osteoporosis
- People such as 9am-5pm office workers, or young people who spend all day indoors on most days and who don't get the recommended sun exposure to at least their whole of arms, face and hands (or equal area)

People in these groups should consult their doctor for advice on whether they need to take a vitamin D supplement.

See your doctor if you are concerned about your vitamin D levels. Vitamin D levels can be checked with a simple blood test and your doctor can advise if a vitamin D supplement is necessary.

For more information

- **Cancer Council**
www.cancer.org.au/positionVitD
- **Cancer Council Helpline** phone: 13 11 20 (cost of a local call anywhere in Australia)
- **Australasian College of Dermatologists**
www.dermcoll.asn.au
- **Osteoporosis Australia**
www.osteoporosis.org.au
- **Australian and New Zealand Bone and Mineral Society**
www.anzbms.org.au
- **Bureau of Meteorology**
www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv
- **Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency**
www.arpansa.gov.au

How much sun is enough in Tasmania

Getting the balance right

Vitamin D and safe sun exposure

The sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation is both the major cause of skin cancer and the best source of vitamin D.

We need to balance the risk of skin cancer from too much sun exposure with maintaining adequate vitamin D levels. In Tasmania this is especially important because in winter and spring up to 63.7% of women may be vitamin D deficient.

Sensible sun protection does not put people at risk of vitamin D deficiency. But there are times when you should discard your hat and sunscreen.

What is vitamin D and why is it important?

Vitamin D forms in the skin when it is exposed to UV from sunlight. Small amounts of vitamin D can also be obtained in foods such as fatty fish (salmon, herring, mackerel and sardines) eggs and liver. Some margarines and dairy products are fortified with vitamin D.

However, most Australians are unlikely to get enough vitamin D from diet alone. We need vitamin D to maintain good health and to grow and maintain strong bones.

How much sun do we need for healthy bones?

Many Tasmanians don't get enough vitamin D through sun exposure during typical day-to-day outdoor activities.

During the summer months from September 1 to April 30 most Tasmanians can maintain adequate vitamin D levels from just 10 minutes of exposure to sunlight on their face, arms and hands, or the equivalent area of skin, outside peak UV times (before 10am and after 3pm) on most days of the week.

In the winter months from May 1 to August 31, when UV radiation levels are lower, most

people in Tasmania need 30 minutes of unprotected sun exposure a day at noon or 45 minutes a day before 10am or after 2pm to the face, arms and hands or equivalent, for adequate vitamin D.

When do I need sun protection?

Even in winter months, with noon sun exposure of a little over an hour (or earlier morning or later afternoon exposure of around 2 hours) people in Tasmania need proper sun protection or they can still get sunburnt. Sun protection should also be used if you are at high altitude or near reflective surfaces such as snow or water.

Most Australians need sun protection when the UV index is 3 or above. In the summer months from September 1 to April 30 it is safe to get just 10 minutes without sun protection in the early morning or late afternoon when the UV index is below 3.

At other times of day, between 10am and 3pm from September 1 to April 30 proper sun protection methods should always be used.

The only exception is very dark skinned people who need more UV for vitamin D. But they should still wear a hat in summer.

The table below is a guide to average peak UV levels by month for Australian capital cities. UV Index* in selected Australian cities averaged over the days in each month.

Insert table

The UV Index is a measure of the amount of UV from the sun at the earth's surface at solar noon on a particular day. The shaded area identifies the months of the year when sun protection may not be required.

How do I check the UV Index?

The SunSmart UV Alert provides the best guide on when to wear your protective clothing, hat, sunscreen and sunglasses – and when to leave them at home.

The SunSmart UV Alert is issued when the UV Index reaches 3 or above. You can find it on the weather page of daily newspapers or on the Bureau of Meteorology website at www.bom.gov.au (search for 'UV Alert').