



# **Self-Care – Vitamin D Guidance for Care Homes**

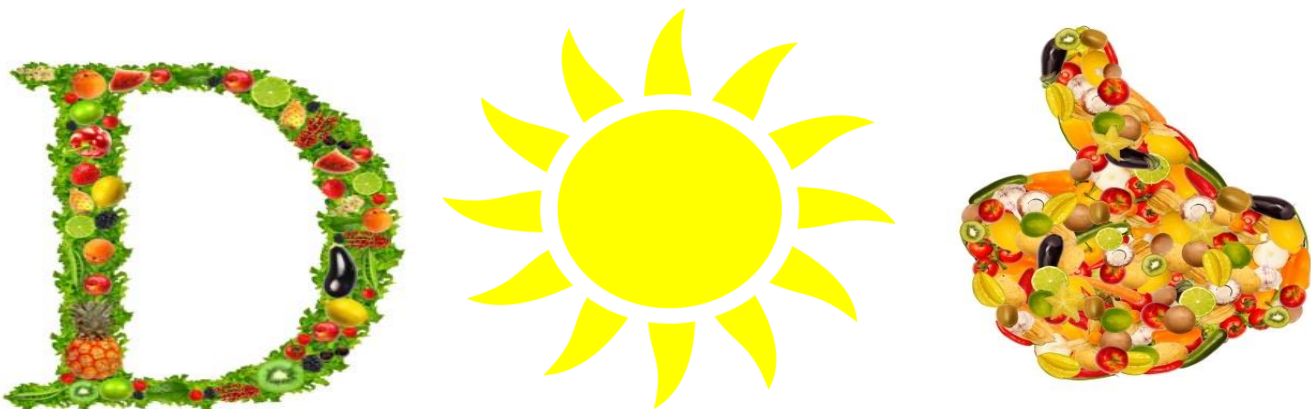
## **Taking care of your “SELF” – Supporting Everyone to Live Freely**

This is a self-care guide designed for those working in care homes, residential homes and assisted living.

The information provided in this guide does not replace person centred clinical advice.

The following information should be used as a guide when advising or purchasing self-care treatments for people residing in a care home, residential home or assisted living. Self-care medication and medical products are not always the most appropriate choice for treating minor ailments. Sometimes starting with a lifestyle change or trying natural remedies can be more effective.

**Should you have any concern, at any time around self-care items being purchased on behalf of the resident or being brought in by relatives for the residents use, please discuss with your community pharmacist or GP practice.**



Vitamin D is essential for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. It allows our bodies to absorb calcium from food. Without vitamin D we don't absorb enough calcium, this can lead to severe bone and muscle weakness in adults.

### **How do we get vitamin D?**

- Vitamin D is made in the skin by the action of sunlight; this is the main source of vitamin D for most people
- You do not have to sunbathe to make vitamin D
- The exact length of time needed in the sun is difficult to determine for an individual and it is important to remember not to burn as this increases your risk of skin cancer. However, between early April and late September we should be exposing our forearms, lower legs



and face to the sun for short periods of time (around 10 minutes or so) without sunscreen; this should be done between 11am and 3pm when possible

- Spending long periods of time in the sun (so that skin becomes red or burnt) will not increase the amount of vitamin D you make
- Vitamin D is actually broken down by too much sunlight; the longer you stay in the sun, especially for prolonged periods without sun protection, the greater your risk of skin cancer
- For longer periods of sun exposure everyone should use sunscreen.

### **It is extremely difficult to get sufficient vitamin D from food alone, but it can be found in:**

- Oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout and sardines
- Meat
- Eggs
- Fortified fat spreads and breakfast cereals
- Some powdered milks.

### **How much vitamin D do I need to take?**

- Public Health England recommends that everyone considers taking a vitamin D supplement of 10 micrograms during the autumn and winter months
- **Those with very little or no sunshine exposure will not obtain enough Vitamin D from sunlight.** These are people who are seldom outdoors and who habitually wear clothes that cover most of their skin while outdoors. This group should take a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (400iu) Vitamin D throughout the year.

**Residents in a care home, residential home or assisted living facility should be supported to do this as part of self-care, to ensure their nutritional needs are met and to prevent developing a vitamin D deficiency.**

### **People in care often fall into the following categories of people who are at a greater risk of deficiencies:**

- People over 65 years of age
- People who spend very little time exposing their skin to sunlight e.g. those who cover their skin for cultural reasons, people who are housebound
- People who have darker skin, such as those of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian origin.

The recommended dose for maintenance therapy for those who have previously been treated for deficiency is **25 micrograms daily (1000iu).**



**If your doctor recommends you take a regular supplement, they are widely available and can be purchased from pharmacies, supermarkets, health and beauty shops or health food stores.**

### **Can I have too much vitamin D?**

- Taking a vitamin D supplement, as well as spending a lot of time outside in sunshine is not a problem, as your body only makes as much vitamin D as it needs. However, do not take more than one supplement containing vitamin D
- If you are already taking a vitamin/mineral supplement then please inform your GP, pharmacist or health food advisor as this product may already contain vitamin D.

### **Summary**

- Vitamin D helps your body to absorb calcium for healthy bones, teeth and muscles
- We get most of our vitamin D from the sun, in the middle of the day, during the summer months (April-September)
- Take care in the sun and use sunscreen if exposing skin for periods longer than 10 minutes
- A small amount of Vitamin D can be obtained from some foods including fortified foods, the main source is SUNSHINE.

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### **References:**

Public Health England -

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/390393/A5\\_Vitamin\\_D\\_leaflet\\_HCP\\_FINAL\\_19.12.14\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390393/A5_Vitamin_D_leaflet_HCP_FINAL_19.12.14_.pdf)

Patient Choices - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>

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