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Vitamin D and Your Child

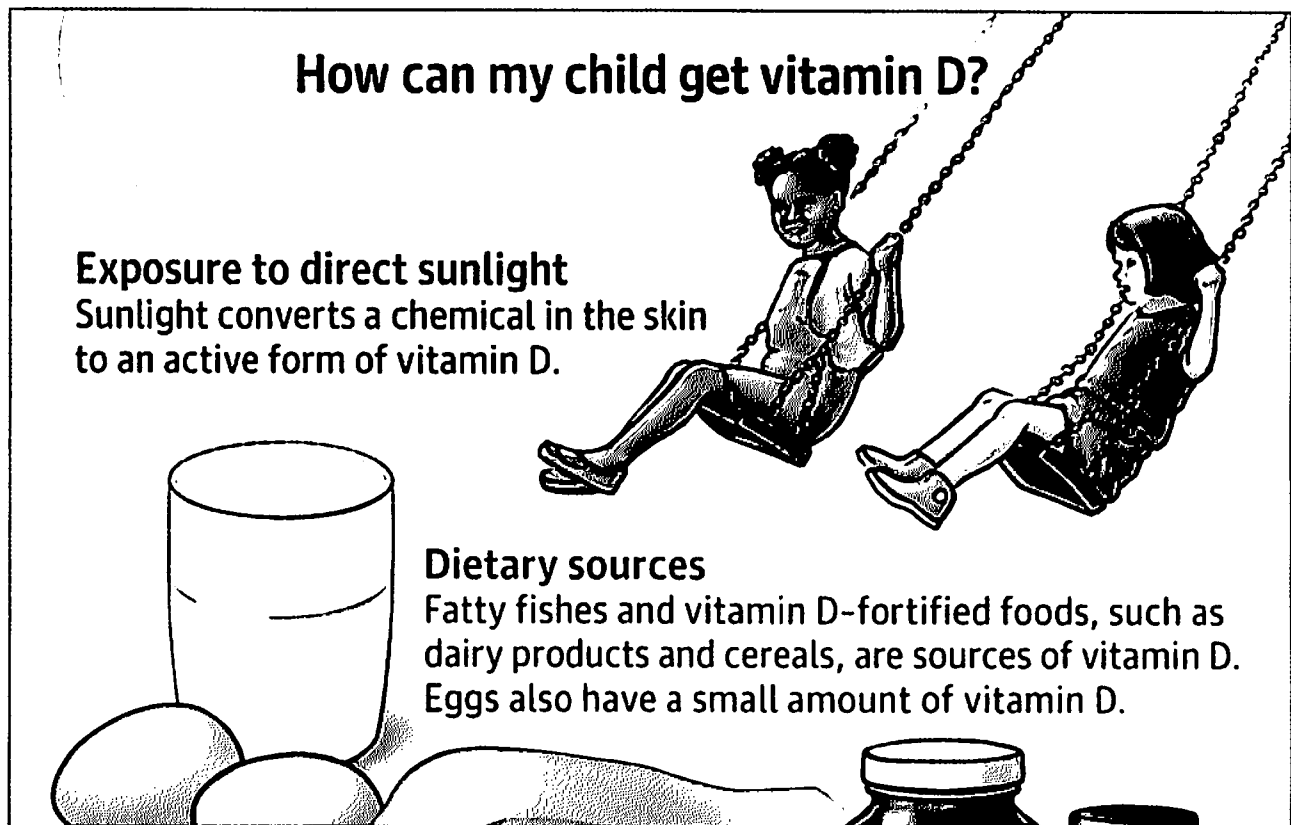
Megan A. Moreno, MD, MEd, MPH

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 Editorial Comment

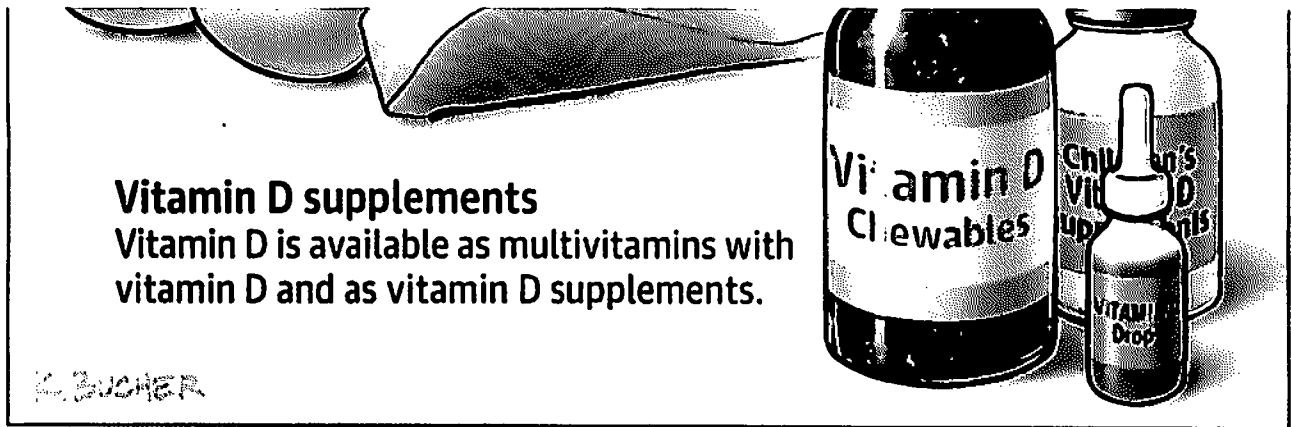
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How can my child get vitamin D?

Exposure to direct sunlight
Sunlight converts a chemical in the skin to an active form of vitamin D.

Dietary sources
Fatty fishes and vitamin D-fortified foods, such as dairy products and cereals, are sources of vitamin D. Eggs also have a small amount of vitamin D.



Vitamin D is essential for building and maintaining healthy bones. While many know that calcium is a primary component of bone growth and development, not everyone knows that calcium can only be absorbed by your body when vitamin D is present.

Research suggests the possibility of other important health benefits for vitamin D throughout life. The current recommendations for vitamin D are 400 international units (IU) per day for infants younger than 12 months and 600 IU for children/adolescents. For infants who are fully or partially breastfed, daily vitamin D supplementation is recommended until the child is fully weaned and drinking fortified milk.

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How Can My Child Get Vitamin D?

There are 3 main ways that your child can get the vitamin D he/she needs. First, people can make vitamin D when their skin is exposed to direct sunlight. The sunlight converts a chemical in the skin to an active form of vitamin D. The amount of vitamin D that somebody's skin can make depends on many factors, including the time of day someone is outside, the season of the year, the latitude of where someone lives, and someone's skin pigmentation. In certain locations, vitamin D production may decrease or even be absent during the winter months. Additionally, while sunscreen is essential for children, it can decrease vitamin D creation.

A second way to provide vitamin D is via your child's diet. However, vitamin D is not found in many foods. Fatty fishes, such as salmon, tuna, and sardines, have vitamin D in them naturally. Eggs have a small amount of vitamin D. Some foods have vitamin D added to them, including drinks such as fortified milk and orange juice and foods such as fortified cereal and yogurt.

A third way to get vitamin D is by taking a supplement. One option is a multivitamin with vitamin D, as most multivitamins for children include the recommended daily amount of vitamin D. There are also vitamin D supplements available as liquids, chewables, or pills. Some supplements have both calcium and vitamin D present.

What If My Child Doesn't Get Enough Vitamin D?

Because vitamin D plays such an important role in bone growth and development, a deficiency in vitamin D can lead to weak or soft bones. A rare but serious condition caused by vitamin D deficiency is rickets, in which children's legs appear bowlegged. Providing vitamin D can prevent and treat this problem. However, there is no evidence to suggest that giving your child extra vitamin D or increased doses will have health benefits.

A Balancing Act

As with many health recommendations for children, some can feel like they contradict each other. Parents need to balance the information with what they know about their child's diet and lifestyle. Sun protection is essential to protect children's skin from sunburn and skin cancer risk, so keep that sunscreen handy. However, some time in the sun is important for vitamin D production. Most children will get enough sun exposure in their day-to-day lives, even with sun protection. Further, while daily multivitamins are not recommended as necessary for children, supplementing with vitamin D may be helpful for those not getting their daily vitamin D allowance through foods or who have limited sun exposure. If you are unsure if your child is getting enough vitamin D, talk with your pediatrician.

For More Information:

American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Vitamin-D-On-the-Double.aspx>

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