

New review launched into Vitamin D intake to help tackle health disparities

- Around one in six adults in the UK have low levels of vitamin D, which can lead to rickets, bone pain and disabilities
- Call for evidence issued to the public, experts, industry and patient groups on innovative ways to boost Vitamin D levels

A new review has been launched to promote the importance of vitamin D and identify ways to improve intake across the population, including through dietary supplements and fortified food and drink.

Around one in six adults and almost 20% of children in the UK have vitamin D levels lower than government recommendations. Older people, the housebound and people from Black and South Asian communities are more likely to have lower levels of the vital vitamin.

Vitamin D deficiency is linked to rickets in children and bone pain and muscle weakness in adults.

The call for evidence, launched today by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), will kickstart a national campaign to raise awareness of the importance of vitamin D and gather views from the public, public health experts, retailers, food manufacturers and other industry bodies on ambitious ways to improve uptake and tackle disparities.

The review comes ahead of the Health Disparities White Paper due to be published later this year, which will set out action to reduce health disparities between different places and communities and address their causes, so that people's backgrounds do not dictate their prospects for a healthy life.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

“We must break the link between background and prospects for a healthy life, and I am determined to level up the health of the nation and tackle disparities.

“People from Black and Asian communities, older people and people who have limited access to the outdoors are more likely to have lower levels of vitamin D, which is essential for bone and muscle health and improving years of life lived in good health.

“I have launched this call for evidence to identify innovative ways we can encourage people to increase their vitamin D intake and help people live longer, healthier and happier lives.”

In the UK, people obtain the majority of vitamin D from sunlight on their

skin during the spring and summer, as dietary sources of vitamin D are limited.

Current advice is for all adults and children to consider taking a daily 10 micrograms supplement of vitamin D between October and March. Some at-risk groups are advised to consider taking a supplement throughout the year. However uptake is low with only one in six adults reporting taking a daily supplement.

The call for evidence will last for six weeks and aims to consider how we improve the population's vitamin D levels, particularly among at risk groups.

OHID will engage with representatives from major retailers, pharmacy and health organisations, patient groups and bodies representing people from at risk groups to support the national awareness campaign.

Dr Tazeem Bhatia, Interim Chief Nutritionist at OHID, said:

"I welcome this call for evidence as part of OHID's continued drive to improve health outcomes and tackle health disparities. We want to improve the dietary health of the population and this includes supporting everyone to maintain sufficient vitamin D levels to support strong and healthy bones and muscles."

As part of the Healthy Start scheme, pregnant women and new mothers who are eligible can receive free supplements, which contains folic acid, vitamin C and vitamin D. Children under the age of four who are eligible can also receive free supplements. However, estimated take-up of free vitamin supplements is extremely low.