

Vitamin D Supplementation

Giving a boost to breast milk levels



Supplements ensure proper intake

A supplement of 400 IU per day of vitamin D is recommended for all breastfed infants. Adequate amounts of vitamin D can be easily provided by currently available liquid vitamin products.

Breastfeeding is the recommended method of infant feeding and provides infants with ideal amounts of necessary nutrients and immune factors. Interestingly, breast milk alone does not provide infants with an adequate intake of vitamin D. Breastfed infants are able to synthesize additional vitamin D through routine sunlight exposure. However, a major public health effort is underway to decrease the risk of skin cancer by encouraging people to limit their sunlight exposure. Furthermore, reports of cases of vitamin D deficiency rickets among breastfed infants in the United States caused researchers to take another look at whether all breastfed infants were getting adequate vitamin D.

Vitamin D deficiency rickets among breastfed infants is rare, but it can occur if an infant does not receive additional vitamin D from a vitamin supplement or from adequate exposure to sunlight. A number of factors decrease the amount of vitamin D a person will synthesize from sunlight. These factors include:

- Living at high latitudes i.e., farther from the equator; particularly during winter months
- Air quality conditions: high levels of air pollution

- Weather conditions: dense cloud covering
- The degree to which clothing covers the skin
- Use of sunscreen
- Skin pigmentation: darker skin types

As a result, in April 2003, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published initial guidelines for vitamin D intake. In November 2008, the AAP published a new statement to replace their 2003 guidelines. The 2008 report recommends a daily intake of vitamin D of 400 IU/day for all infants, children and adolescents beginning in the first few days of life.

Human milk typically contains a vitamin D concentration of 25 IU per liter or less. Therefore, a supplement of 400 IU per day of vitamin D is recommended for all breastfed infants. Adequate amounts of vitamin D can be achieved by currently available multivitamin products containing 400 IU of vitamin D per mL or the newly available preparations that contain 400 IU/mL vitamin D alone without other vitamins. Infant formula is required to have 400IU of vitamin D added to every liter.

Recent research highlights the im-



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portance of Vitamin D for everyone. Vitamin D deficiency has now been linked to cancer, multiple sclerosis and diabetes. While infants and small children are the focus of the clinical report from the AAP, lactating mothers should also consider taking supplemental Vitamin D. It is unlikely for a person to obtain adequate vitamin D from natural dietary sources alone.

Food sources for Vitamin D include:

- Fatty fish

- Fish liver oils

- Eggs (small amount of vitamin D)

- Artificially Fortified products (milk, margarine, breakfast cereals, juice)

You should talk with your healthcare provider about vitamin D and breastfeeding. Each mother-baby dyad situation is different, and you and your healthcare provider understand your situation best. After considering what you want and expect, as well as your current health situation and that of your infant, the two of you can make a shared decision about vitamin D and breastfeeding that is right for you.