

## VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY

### Why do we need Vitamin D?

We need Vitamin D so that our bodies can use the calcium in food. Calcium helps to:

- build strong and healthy bones, teeth and muscles
- prevent rickets (soft and weakened bones) in children
- prevent bone fractures in the elderly.

### Where is Vitamin D found?

- Most of the Vitamin D needed by the body is made by cells in the skin when sunlight shines on the skin.
- There are only small amounts of Vitamin D in foods like eggs, margarine, oils, milk and saltwater fish (eg tuna, salmon, mackerel, sardines).
- It is hard to get enough Vitamin D just from food; some sunlight is needed.

### Who is at risk of Vitamin D deficiency?

- Children as their bones are growing
- People with dark skin
- People who haven't been exposed to enough sunlight
- People who cover most of their body
- Frail, elderly people
- People with medical conditions like some bowel diseases.

### How is it diagnosed?

- A blood test can check to see if you have low Vitamin D.
- Your doctor may refer children with Vitamin D deficiency to a specialist to check their bone development.

### How is Vitamin D deficiency treated?

- Your family doctor may prescribe Vitamin D tablets, which usually have to be taken every day for several months.
- In Australia, being in the sun for 5 to 15 minutes, several times a week will give you enough sunlight to make Vitamin D. People with darker skins need 15 to 45 minutes in the sun.
- Remember to use sunscreen if you are in the sun between 11 am and 3pm during the summer months. Always avoid sunburn.
- Ensure you have a well balanced diet, including foods containing calcium. Some foods which contain calcium are dairy products (like milk, cheese, butter, yoghurt), soy bean products, green vegetables (like spinach, broccoli), boiled eggs, oranges and dried apricots.

**Further information is available from**