

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Expert Comment: Are you getting your 10-15 minutes of sunshine a day?

Scientists at The University of Manchester are recommending that everyone enjoys daily sun exposure of 10-15 minutes (25-40 minutes for people with darker skin) during the spring and summer months to avoid vitamin D deficiency all year round.

Exposure to sunlight is important because it is most people's principal source of vitamin D. Vitamin D is vital throughout life to maintain good bone health and inadequate vitamin D can cause rickets in children and bone disease in adults. UK levels of vitamin D deficiency are high (particularly among people with darker skin and during the winter months) and there is evidence that this is a growing problem. At the same time, for several decades, public health communications have emphasised the risks of exposure to sunlight in terms of sunburn and skin cancer.

The University of Manchester research is significant because it informs public health advice that balances *adequate* levels of sunlight exposure for vitamin D production with the risks of sunburn and skin cancer.

Professor Ann Webb, Professor of Atmospheric Radiation, commented: "Vitamin D is really important for healthy bones. When it comes to safe sunlight exposure and vitamin D, our research shows that 'little and often' is the best approach for most people."

Professor Lesley Rhodes, Clinical Professor of Experimental Dermatology, added: "Many people in the UK get insufficient vitamin D. Our research shows that regular, low levels of sunlight exposure can help alleviate the problems of vitamin D deficiency in the UK."

The science bit

- For people with lighter skin, daily (or almost daily) sunlight exposure of unprotected skin for just 10-15 minutes during the spring and summer months will avoid vitamin D deficiency all year round. For most, this will be a relatively safe level of exposure, balancing the benefits of vitamin D and the risks of skin cancer. It is important to note that this should be undertaken in the middle of the day, with exposure of lower arms and lower legs to maximise benefit.
- For people with darker skin, 25-40 minutes of exposure under the same conditions will avoid summertime vitamin D deficiency, and vitamin D supplements are advisable during the winter months
- Be careful: Importantly, levels of sunlight exposure that make an individual's skin look pink or sunburnt – either during or some hours after exposure – are too high and should always be avoided. People with very light or sensitive skin or taking immunosuppressive medication and others who may not be able to follow this advice should seek further guidance from their doctor about alternative sources of vitamin D.

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