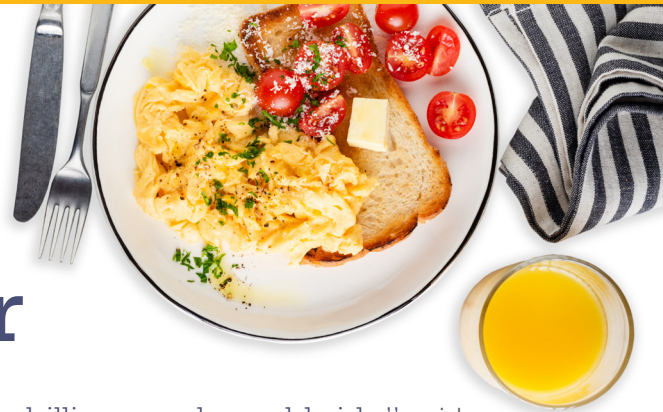


How to Maintain Healthy Vitamin D Levels During Winter



If you've ever been through an Ohio winter, you know how rare sunny days can be! Less sun exposure can leave your vitamin D levels in need of a boost.

Vitamin D supports your body's ability to absorb calcium, which builds and maintains strong bone health. While found in some foods, vitamin D is nicknamed the "sunshine vitamin" because its primary source comes from ultraviolet rays from the sun.

Because winter weather limits skin exposure and shortens daylight hours, absorbing healthy levels of vitamin D can be a challenge. But maintaining sufficient levels can help you avoid a vitamin D deficiency.

Vitamin D deficiency

Think of getting enough vitamin D like a plant needing sunlight to thrive. Similarly, if your body has low levels of vitamin D, health issues can occur.

Adults with vitamin D deficiency can experience soft, thin or brittle bones, putting them at risk for bone fractures. In children, a severe deficiency of vitamin D can lead to rickets, a rare condition where bones soften and weaken, which can cause delays in growth and development.

Other symptoms like muscle pain, weakness and cramps, mood changes and fatigue can also be attributed to vitamin D deficiency.

"This condition is very common, affecting

about one billion people worldwide," said Dr. Olapeju Olasokan, Assistant Medical Director at Medical Mutual.

How to get enough vitamin D

Talk with your primary care provider (PCP) about checking and maintaining healthy vitamin D levels.

Your PCP may suggest adjusting your nutrition habits to include more vitamin D-rich foods, such as egg yolks, fatty fish like salmon, trout or tuna, and fortified foods with added vitamin D like orange juice, some dairy products and breakfast cereals.

You can also ensure adequate vitamin D levels by taking supplements. While these are available over the counter, extremely high doses can lead to toxic levels and serious health problems. Consult your PCP before taking supplements.

"It is possible to take too much vitamin D supplementation," Dr. Olasokan said, listing side effects like nausea, vomiting, muscle weakness, dehydration and even kidney stones.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends children nine years and older, and adults over 18, should not exceed a daily upper limit of 4,000 international units (IU) of vitamin D.

Medical Mutual can help you find a PCP. Use our provider search tool at [MedMutual.com/FindAProvider](https://www.MedMutual.com/FindAProvider) or call the Customer Care phone number listed on your member ID card to speak to a representative.



EYE EXAMS:

Essential for Your Overall Health

An annual eye examination might seem like one more thing to add to your to-do list, but eye health is key to your overall wellness.

Eye exams don't just monitor your vision or mark changes to your lens prescription; they help detect or diagnose health conditions that can impact your vision and other non-eye-related issues – even if you aren't showing symptoms.

Early detection matters

Chronic conditions with long-term effects to vision are often detected during an eye exam. For example, diabetes can cause diabetic retinopathy, which is the leading cause, and one of the most preventable causes, of vision loss and blindness in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Other chronic conditions that cause vision complications include hypertension, HIV/AIDS and autoimmune diseases like systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and Behcet's disease.

And it's not just medical conditions. "Long-term effects resulting from certain medications can also be prevented with regular eye exams," said Dr. Misty Arnold, Assistant Medical Director at Medical Mutual.

Discuss any potential risks of your medications with your primary care provider (PCP).

Preventing vision loss or worsening eyesight can be treated when caught early enough.

Individuals over the age of 60 are at the highest risk for eye diseases, as well as those with diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), RA or osteoporosis.

Eye exams are preventive care, too

You don't have to wear lenses or have issues with your eyesight to justify having your vision checked regularly.

"Eye exams should be done yearly like any other preventive health screening," Dr. Arnold said.

She recommends scheduling an eye exam along with other yearly appointments, such as physical exams and blood work.

Be aware of any issues occurring with your vision and see a doctor immediately if you experience severe eye pain or irritation, or severe headaches.

Vision loss, even if temporary, floaters, flashes and halos can all be signs of significant health issues. Contact your eye care provider to schedule an evaluation.

Medical Mutual partners with EyeMed to provide competitive vision benefits with cost effective options for vision services. Call the Medical Mutual Customer Care number listed on your member ID card to speak to a representative.

Individual ACA members can purchase individual vision separately, which has providers available through the EyeMed Access network.

Know the Signs of Sleep Apnea and What It Means for Your Health

You got a full night's sleep. So, why are you waking up feeling exhausted? Sleep apnea might be the culprit.

Sleep apnea is a disorder where breathing repeatedly stops and starts while asleep, resulting in a lack of oxygen to vital organs. This can present as:

- **Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA):** Muscles that support soft tissue in the back of the throat relax and narrow, blocking airflow into the lungs.
- **Central sleep apnea (CSA):** The brain fails to send signals to breathing-related muscles to work.

The drop in oxygen levels alerts your brain, causing you to wake up. "This can be between five and 240 times during a full eight hours of sleep," said Dr. Linda Patterson, Manager, Utilization Management Medical Director at Medical Mutual.

Sleep apnea can affect anyone at any age. Adults commonly experience symptoms like loud snoring or gasping for breath, while children can experience bedwetting or night sweats.

Why a good night's sleep matters

Excessive daytime drowsiness can result in trouble concentrating, behavioral issues and an increased

risk for motor vehicle and workplace accidents.

There's also an increased risk for severe or life-threatening complications, such as high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, and heart and liver problems.

Treating sleep apnea

Talk to your primary care provider (PCP) if you suspect you or a loved one has sleep apnea.

Conservative treatments for OSA include lifestyle or medication changes, over-the-counter products and sleep aid items.

Durable medical equipment, like a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, oral devices or nerve stimulators, can also alleviate symptoms. Coverage for these devices may be available through your Medical Mutual plan. Check with your PCP to see if this option is right for you.

Medical Mutual can help you find a PCP. Use our provider search tool at [MedMutual.com/FindAProvider](https://www.medmutual.com/FindAProvider) or call the Customer Care phone number listed on your member ID card to speak with a representative.

Upgraded Access to Your Health Plan

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- Update or download the app today by searching MedMutual in the Apple App Store® and Google Play®.

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Kickstart Your Health Journey for 2025

Now is the perfect time to ensure your health and wellness are on track:

- Schedule your 2025 annual wellness visit with your primary care provider.
- Get your flu shot and COVID-19 booster.
- Install the MedMutual mobile app on your smartphone.



Making a Difference Today for a Healthier Tomorrow

For 90 years, Medical Mutual has been your trusted hometown health insurer, dedicated to the health and well-being of Ohioans in the communities where we live and work. We've embraced helping our neighbors live healthier through every stage of life.

Cheers to the next 90 years!

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100 American Road
Cleveland, OH 44144-2322

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