

Media Release

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Vitamin D supplementation may reduce severe asthma attacks: Cochrane review

Complementary Medicines Australia (CMA) has today welcomed an independent Cochrane review that indicates taking vitamin D supplements in addition to asthma medication decreases the risk of severe asthma attacks.¹

“The researchers looked at nine recent clinical trials, seven involving 435 children and two studies involving 658 adults. Overall, the review found evidence that taking a vitamin D supplement could reduce the risk of severe asthma attacks requiring hospital admission from 6% to around 3%,” said Mr Carl Gibson, chief executive officer of CMA.

The Cochrane review’s lead author, Professor Adrian Martineau, said they found vitamin D “significantly reduced the risk of severe asthma attacks, without causing side effects,” and that additional research was required to establish the benefits, especially in young people and children.

“These latest findings follow recent UK-based guidance recommending everyone in the UK should take vitamin D supplements, with the aim of ensuring the majority of the population has enough vitamin D in their blood to protect the health of their bones,” said Mr Gibson.

“Vitamin D is generally known as the sunshine vitamin, as skin exposure to sunlight is the most common way for vitamin D to be absorbed into the body. In Australia, between 31% and 58% of the population is found to suffer from vitamin D deficiency,² so we cannot assume that Australians receive adequate vitamin D from casual exposure to sunlight.”

“A responsible and preventative approach is to acknowledge that a large proportion of the population is vitamin D deficient and not just those at high risk. This is where vitamin D fortified foods and vitamin D supplements come into the disease prevention equation. More of us should be supplementing vitamin D as it is a cost-effective and easy approach to avoiding vitamin D deficiencies,” Mr Gibson explained.

“Vitamin D plays an important role in regulating the amount of calcium and phosphate in the body, which makes it essential for bone health. Without enough vitamin D, bones can become thin and brittle. Limited amounts of vitamin D are found in foods such as oily fish, liver, eggs, milk and fortified cereals, but for most people the majority of their vitamin D is made from the action of sunlight on their skin.”

CMA strongly advocates following the instructions and dosage guidance on supplement product labels, as with any medication, and to seek advice from a healthcare provider.

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¹ <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD011511.pub2/full>

² Boyages, S.C. (2016). Vitamin D testing: new targeted guidelines stem the overtesting tide. MJA 204 (1) doi: 10.5694/mja15.00497

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