

Discovered! The vitamin D level that tips your fat-burning switch

6 pounds a week just fall off!



Research confirms vitamin D is a weight-loss wonder. But 74% of women who supplement (even with an MD-prescribed vitamin) still don't get enough. Here's help

When a flurry of studies came out in the early 2000s revealing the weight-loss powers of vitamin D, health experts were buzzing. It seemed scientists had finally discovered a miracle pill that would help us slim without struggle. Flash-forward to 2015: Millions of women took vitamin D daily and when the scale barely budged, they were left to wonder if the news was just hype.

Experts knew the previous studies hadn't been a fluke, so why weren't women losing weight? Scientists at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle have finally found the answer. In a double-blind trial, postmenopausal women were broken into two groups: One took a placebo daily; the other took 2,000 IUs of vitamin D. Why 2,000 IU? "At the time we began the study, that was the maximum amount the Institute of Medicine recommended without close medical follow-up. So it was 'real world' type of dosing," says study author Anne McTiernan, M.D., Ph.D. Both groups exercised roughly the same amount (140 minutes a week) and restricted calories to the same degree, on the same diet. What the researchers found: Vitamin D didn't seem to have any significant effect on body weight.

A closer look at the data, though, revealed something exciting. "When the Hutchinson researchers looked at the groups more specifically, they discovered that women whose blood levels of vitamin D were above 32ng/ml had greater weight loss than women whose D levels didn't get above that mark," says vitamin D expert James Dowd, M.D., an associate clinical professor at the Michigan State University College of Human Medicine in Grand Rapids, who analyzed the study. Indeed, despite the fact that all the women in the study supplemented daily with 2,000 IUs of vitamin D for an entire year, only 26 percent achieved blood levels of vitamin D above the "sufficient" range of 32 nanograms of vitamin D precursor per milliliter of blood (32 ng/ml). And those women lost 160 percent more belly inches—and 52 percent more weight overall—than the rest of the study subjects.

What went wrong for the other 74 percent of women? It comes down to the fact that for vitamin D to have a slimming effect, there must be ample amounts of the nutrient (above 32 ng/ml) circulating in the bloodstream. But D is a fat-soluble vitamin, which means it is attracted to—and ends up getting stuck inside—fat cells. "The body's fat stores are a reservoir for vitamin D, and generally people who are overweight are D deficient," says Dr. Dowd. "When they take D, it just keeps disappearing into their fat stores where it sits, unusable. It's stuck in the fat."

The key to weight loss is to literally flood fat cells with vitamin D. "You keep pouring vitamin D in until fat stores fill up, and the D spills out into the bloodstream," Dr. Dowd says. But as research shows, following a one-size-fits-all D recommendation of 2,000 IU (the amount commonly prescribed by physicians), won't always do the trick.

He explains that people with excess pounds have more and larger fat cells, so the vitamin D gets spread out over those cells and there's not enough to create overflow into the bloodstream. A thinner person has fewer, smaller fat cells that fill up faster, causing more D to overflow into the bloodstream and allowing them to reach the slimming threshold of 32 ng/ml much more easily. In fact, research at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha suggests overweight women need to take in 2 times more D to get to the same blood levels as thinner women.

Once D levels do hit the slimming threshold, it's like a fat-loss switch is flipped in the body. Studies have linked vitamin D deficiency with insulin resistance and demonstrated that when D levels are restored, insulin resistance improves. Why that's so beneficial: "Insulin is the major driver of fat production," says Dr. Dowd. But vitamin D's effect on insulin—as well as other key fat-regulating hormones—shifts the body out of fat-making mode and into fat-melting mode.

As the body burns stored fat, the slimming results multiply. When fat cells empty out and shrink, the "reservoirs" for vitamin D become smaller, so less and less D gets stuck there—and there's more of the vitamin in the bloodstream to further support weight loss.

Stubborn fat melting off your frame isn't the only benefit. "It's mind-boggling how many health problems have a D deficiency element," says Dr. Dowd. Energy soars in just two weeks, as risk of cancers, heart disease and diabetes plummet.

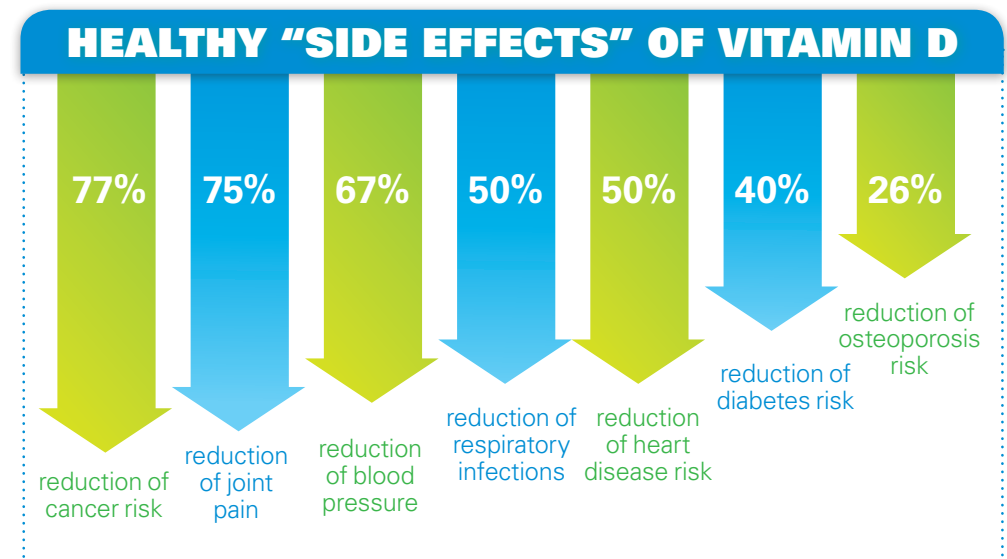


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Start slimming today

You can lose up to 6 pounds each week just by getting your vitamin D levels above the study-proven fat-melting threshold. But the amount of D needed to get to the tipping point is different for everyone. To determine *your* ideal dose, your doctor can perform a 25 hydroxy D test—or you can complete the test at home with a Vitamin D Council Test Kit (\$50, VitaminDCouncil.org).

But if you'd like to get started on boosting your D levels right away, James E. Dowd, M.D., author of *The Vitamin D Cure*, offers a simple formula that can help you determine your ideal amount: Multiply your weight by 25 (ie, 200 pounds by 25 = 5,000). That number is the amount of vitamin D (measured as IUs) you should take daily. So a 200-pound woman would take 5,000 IUs of vitamin D daily. And while this dose may sound like a lot—especially since the government set the “safe upper limit” of supplemental D to 4,000 IUs daily in 2010—Dr. Dowd assures that it's completely safe: “With D, you're taking the precursor to the active hormone, and then your body decides how much to make from that,” he explains. “So you have a huge safety window.” Once you've determined your slimming dose, put these strategies to work to get the most from your D:

CHOOSE THE OPTIMAL FORMULATION

Vitamin D researcher Anne McTiernan, M.D., Ph.D., has subjects in her studies take vitamin D₃ instead of vitamin D₂, and Dr. Dowd agrees that this form of the nutrient is best. “This is one of my pet peeves: A lot of doctors prescribe 50,000 IUs of prescription D₂ a week and think everything is hunky-dory,” says Dr. Dowd. “But 50,000 IUs of vitamin D₂ a week is probably the equivalent of 1,600 or 1,700 IUs of D₃ a day—it's below even the government recommendation.” Plus, D₂ is a plant-based form that is metabolized incredibly quickly in the body while D₃ is the form that our bodies naturally make from the sunlight. Because D₃ lasts a lot longer in the blood, it can support even more slimming.

Dr. Dowd also notes that he doesn't recommend pills combined with calcium, which can cause GI distress. Two top-rated brands to try: Life Extension Vitamin D₃ 5,000 IU (\$10 for 60 softgels, LEF.org) is perfect for women who need an even 5,000 IU dose while Natrol Vitamin D₃ 2,000 IU (\$13 for 90 fast-dissolve tabs, Natrol.com and your local health-food store) offers more dosage flexibility and comes in a strawberry-flavored sublingual tab.



TAILOR YOUR INTAKE TO YOUR LIFESTYLE

You can supplement daily, or if it's easier for you to remember, take a larger dose of D once or twice a week. “That's the beauty of D₃,” says Dr. Dowd. “You can spread out the doses.” For example, a 200-pound woman could take 5,000 IUs each day or supplement with 17,500 IUs twice a week, or even 35,000 IUs once a week. “Maybe it's Sunday,” suggests Dr. Dowd. “You go to church, you come home and you take your entire dose for the week.”

BOOST ABSORPTION WITH THIS FOOD FORMULA

Whether you take it once a week or once a day, pop D with a meal. “Bile acids enhance vitamin D absorption,” explains Dr. Dowd. To create the ideal environment to absorb, convert and use vitamin D for slimming, he advises alkalizing the body by eating plenty of fresh produce—with an emphasis on leafy greens. “Consume three times as much fresh produce as lean meat. After age 45 or 50, you have to lean your diet way up,” he says, explaining that eating fewer carbs, limiting acidifying dairy and filling up on healthy whole foods reverses the body's fat-storing systems to release more D and alkalizes the body's pH to ensure that D can work its slimming magic.

RECALCULATE FOR EVERY 20 POUNDS LOST

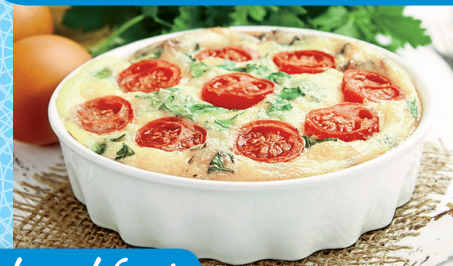
Optimizing your blood levels may take up to 3 months and can take longer for darker-skinned women, who tend to have blood levels of D that are about 10 ng/ml less on average than light-skinned women, Dr. Dowd says. After that initial period, he recommends recalculating your ideal intake for every 20 pounds you lose. Over time, you'll be able to taper back to smaller doses.

Note: If you take medications that reduce cholesterol absorption, take your D 12 hours before the medication to get the most benefit. If you take anticonvulsants, have your D levels tested regularly—these drugs activate enzymes that break down the vitamin.

Should I take less D in the summer?

Exposure to sunlight boosts the body's vitamin D stores, but Dr. Dowd doesn't recommend adjusting your dose in the summer. “The effect of the sun on our vitamin D levels is pretty minimal in this modern world,” he explains. “Most of us are employed indoors, and most of us wear sunscreen.” And even if we didn't slather on the sunscreen, women over 40 would still have trouble getting optimal amounts of D from sun exposure. Says Dr. Dowd, “Production of active vitamin D and its precursors by the kidneys and the liver, as well as the ability of the skin to make vitamin D from sunlight, become less efficient as we age.”

A sample day to jump-start weight loss



breakfast

Baked tomato omelet: Mix 2 eggs, ¼ cup milk, 1 cup tomatoes, 1 cup sliced spinach, 2 Tbs. diced onions and 1 Tbs. Parmesan. Bake in greased dish at 350°F for 20 min. or until done.



snack

Chocolate-covered oranges: Dip orange slices in melted dark chocolate. Also delicious: pear slices with 2 Tbs. almond butter, or a mix of 2 Tbs. each dried cherries and walnuts.



lunch

Tuna salad wrap: Top a large romaine lettuce leaf with sliced cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, corn and 1 can tuna, drained. Drizzle with ½ tsp. olive oil and a splash of lemon or lime juice.



dinner

Pork loin dinner: In 1 Tbs. herb butter, sear 4 oz. pork tenderloin. Stir 2 Tbs. ginger into drippings for sauce. Serve with 1½ cups steamed cauliflower, carrot and pea blend.

It worked for me

“I feel like I'm 18 again!”

Marie Triolo looked at the knees of her favorite pants and realized the fabric was wearing thin. A sense of dread rushed in. She'd worn and washed that same pair of “functional but unfashionable” pants nearly every day for the past 15 years because she didn't want to shop for new clothes. In a dressing room, there'd be no way to avoid the mirrors, and Marie took great pains to never look at her body in a mirror.

Despite dieting, Marie couldn't get her weight under control. “It was so frustrating to step on a scale and see I'd only lost a fraction of a pound,” she shares. “It was a vicious cycle of feeling hopeless that led to eating M&M's, which led to more weight...and more M&M's.”

Hope came when Marie saw Sue Decotiis, M.D., who talked about the benefits of vitamin D₃. “I was told if I took it in the morning, it would help with well-being so I wouldn't get so emotional and overeat,” says Marie, who took 10,000 IUs sublingually daily.

Sure enough, Marie's cravings eased and she shed 6 pounds the first week—and 6 pants sizes in 16 months. “It made me wonder why D wasn't included in every diet,” says Marie, who is now happy to hit the mall and go on countless other adventures that she never dreamed of before. She recently climbed a 40-foot rock wall in Vegas. “I looked at it and said, ‘I can do that!’”

Marie lost 95 lbs!

Marie Triolo, 56, Bronx, NY
Height: 5'1"

NOW: 139 lbs



THEN: 234 lbs

PHOTO: MARIE; SCOTT H. JONES; H & M; NICOLE FRANCAVILLA; STYLIST: WENDY OSWALD KINNEY; STILLS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FOTOLIA; GETTY; FOOD & PHOTO; CORBIS