Vitamin D – what it is and why it’s important

Vitamin D ensures adequate amounts of minerals, including calcium, are absorbed in the body. Calcium is essential for bone growth and overall bone health.

Our body makes vitamin D from sunlight, the key source of this nutrient. That’s why it’s sometimes called the “sunshine” vitamin. Food sources include salmon, tuna and egg yolks. It’s also added to milk and cereals. Vitamin D can also come from supplements.

How much is enough?
The Institutes of Medicine (IOM) has established Vitamin D intake values based on age and gender of between 600 and 800 IU per day. The IOM conducted a review of the current evidence and found that most Americans get enough vitamin D. However, because vitamin D supplements are generally safe when taken at the recommended levels, many people choose to take supplements to ensure they get enough vitamin D. You should talk with your doctor before beginning a regimen of vitamin D because it can interact with other medications.

How much is too little?
For some people, this is a difficult question to answer. There is no one scientifically established value that determines vitamin D deficiency. Adding to the confusion, different labs use different values to determine deficiency and there is no standardization in the testing process. These factors call into question the accuracy of some vitamin D deficiency test results.

The good news is that most people do not need a vitamin D test to be sure you are getting enough vitamin D. Similar to calcium intake recommendations, vitamin D testing is not required in order to follow IOM guidelines for vitamin D intake.

Should I be tested?
Vitamin D testing is not recommended for healthy people. Vitamin D testing has become popular for conditions like depression, low energy or Alzheimer’s disease. However, there is no scientific evidence that vitamin D testing or supplements improves symptoms or overall health.

Who should be tested?
Some people have medical conditions that require monitoring of vitamin D levels. These issues are often related to bone health, like rickets or osteoporosis. Other medical
conditions may lower vitamin D, like chronic kidney disease or malabsorption disorders. People with these conditions may benefit from vitamin D testing and supplements.

**Will my insurance cover vitamin D testing?**
If you have a clinical condition that is caused or made worse by low levels of vitamin D, testing is considered medically necessary and Regence will cover the costs.

If you are healthy or do not have a bone health condition, then vitamin D testing is not considered medically necessary, and it is not covered.

Our contracted providers know this and avoid testing that is not medically necessary. However, if you go to providers that are not in the Regence network, they may order testing that is not medically necessary and you may be responsible for paying the bill.

**Protect yourself.**
Avoid unexpected medical bills by asking your provider these questions before you get any testing:
- What do we hope to learn from this test?
- Is this test considered medically necessary?
- Will the results of this test change my treatment plan?
- Will my insurance cover it?
- How much does it cost?

**Summary**
All people need a sufficient level of vitamin D and should follow recommended intake values for vitamin D and calcium to ensure bone health. The IOM recommendations for daily calcium and vitamin D are widely accepted standards for the right dosage of Vitamin D supplementation.

Vitamin D testing is only medically needed in patients with specific conditions associated with a loss of bone density. It is not recommended for the general population, as patients may assure appropriate vitamin D levels by following the general IOM vitamin D intake guidelines.