

Sunlight exposure, Vitamin D3 and supplements



YOUR HEALTH

DR GITA MATHAI

Q My Vitamin D3 levels are low, and I have been advised to take supplements. Can I get Vitamin D3 from sunlight?

Your body can produce Vitamin D3 when your skin is exposed to sunlight. For effective synthesis, expose your bare arms, legs and back to direct sunlight for short periods, preferably between 10am and 4pm. However, this is also the hottest part of the day, so care must be taken to avoid sunburn and heat exhaustion.

But Vitamin D3 cannot be synthesised if your skin is covered by clothing or blocked by glass. In addition to sunlight, certain foods such as egg yolk, liver and fatty fish contain small amounts of Vitamin D3.

If your levels are significantly low, recovery is usually faster and more reliable when you take supplements as prescribed by your doctor.

DIY moisturiser

Q My skin is very dry, and moisturisers are expensive.

Once a week, you can apply a small quantity of a mixture made from 250ml of coconut oil, 250ml of sesame oil and 100ml of castor oil to your entire body. Leave it on for about 10 minutes, then bathe using a glycerine-based moisturising soap. You can also add about 30ml of coconut oil to your bath water daily to help retain moisture in the skin. At night, apply liquid paraffin over the whole body to lock in hydration. These measures are inexpensive and can be quite effective in managing dry skin.

Loss of balance

Q I am 62 years old and have had diabetes for 15 years. Recently, I noticed a tendency to lose my balance and fall to the right.

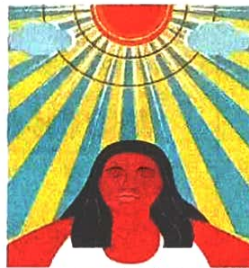
Long-standing diabetes can affect the nerves (peripheral neuropathy), reducing sensation in the feet and impairing balance. It may also affect vision and coordination. While weakness on one side can occur, a persistent tendency to fall to one side should be evaluated to rule out other causes, such as inner ear problems or neurological conditions.

Try 30 minutes of aerobic activity daily. In addition, do balance and strengthening exercises. These can include one-leg stands, heel-to-toe walking, chair squats and calf raises.

It is important to consult a doctor, especially if the imbalance is recent or worsening, to identify the exact cause and prevent falls.

Hairy problem

Q I am a 55-year-old woman and have developed a moustache. I started shaving but that only results in coarse, dark bristles growing back quickly.



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Although shaving is quick and painless, the hair regrows rapidly. An epilator can also be used; it removes hair from the root. Threading and waxing last longer but they

are usually best done professionally.

Hair removal creams are another option but test them on a patch of skin first to check for any allergic reaction.

For more permanent solutions, hair can be removed with electrolysis or laser treatment. Also, consult a physician to rule out any treatable cause for this sudden hair growth.

Hydration

Q How much water should I drink to stay hydrated in summer?

A rule of thumb is to drink water before you feel thirsty. You can also monitor the colour of your urine; it should be pale yellow, not dark like tea. Children may not feel thirsty and be so busy playing that they do not stop to drink water. In this hot, dehydrating summer, keep an eye on your child's urine (colour and quantity). Also, remember that fruit juices and colas may not help with rehydration, especially if they are hypertonic.

The writer has a family practice at Vellore and is the author of *Staying Healthy in Modern India*. If you have any questions on health issues, please write to yourhealthgm@yahoo.co.in