

# Vit D deficiency increasing among Indians

**GO OUTDOORS** Lack of Vitamin D causes muscle weakness, joint pain, weak bones and hormonal imbalance



■ Experts say that 45 minutes of exposure to sunlight will help prevent vitamin D deficiency diseases.

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**NEW DELHI:** Lack of the sunshine vitamin is plaguing Indians in a big way. As many as 84% people surveyed have vitamin D deficiency, mostly because of increasing sedentary behaviour.

An extensive analysis of blood test reports from 37,010 people across India showed that vitamin D deficiency was prevalent in around 69% of the population.

Another 15% more were found to be vitamin D insufficient, taking the total proportion of risk-prone Indians to 84%, showed data from SRL Diagnostics Survey.

Men between ages 30 years and 60 years, and adolescent girls and women of child-bearing ages — 16 to 30 years — are more likely to develop vitamin D deficiency, and require supplements.

Women after pregnancy are also at a high risk of developing osteoporosis due to high demands of calcium and vitamin D.

Tests that estimate the level of vitamin D have become increasingly common as doctors are getting people who complain of weakness in muscles, cramps, fatigue, joint pain, etc., that are typical of low vitamin D levels in the body. Till a decade ago, doctors assumed people in India do not need supplements for Vitamin D.

"If I get 10 persons screened, almost all will have low vitamin D levels. We suspect the problem was always there only it got aggravated more now with the indoor culture that perhaps explains why even young people have low levels of the vitamin nowadays," said Dr Tripat Choudhary, senior consultant, department of obstetrics and gynaecology at New Delhi's Fortis La Femme.

"Women with vitamin D deficiency have either premature babies or babies with retarded growth, weak bones or have bow-shaped legs at

birth," added Dr Choudhary.

Against the normal level of 30 ng/ml, doctors are getting people with levels as low as 4 ng/ml.

Vitamin D is not just to have strong bones, it also helps protect against diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular and other illnesses.

"Parathyroid hormone helps in regulating body's calcium and phosphorus levels. If the vitamin levels fall too low, the gland secretes the hormone to balance out the effect. In large quantity this can adversely impact health, said Dr Nikhil Tandon, professor, department of endocrinology and metabolism, AIIMS.

Exposure to the sun is a natural and most effective source of vitamin D, yet the most neglected.

Apart from following a healthy lifestyle, 45 minutes of the mid-morning sunshine is important as body synthesizes the vitamin under the sun. It helps absorb phosphorus and calcium necessary for bone health.

According to experts, the best time is between 10am and 2pm, with head, face, limbs and upper part of the body exposed to direct sunlight.

"One must be careful that it has to be done without any break as the whole process gets reversed if one leaves the sun even for 5min," said Dr Rajesh Malhotra, professor, orthopaedics department, AIIMS.

Since staying under the sun for that long is not really feasible, Vitamin D supplementation is the next best alternative. The dose is continued for about three months in the form of tablets or sachets, and later people are put on a maintenance dose for about a year every day.

"It's still not a popular trend here, but in the west one gets fortified food items such as milk, flour, oil etc. with essential micro nutrients that fills the gap," added Dr Malhotra.