**Vitamin D protects bones. It may help ward off colds, too.**

By Linda Searing March 11

The question

People often take vitamin D supplements for the health of their bones, but the vitamin aids muscles, nerves and the immune system, too. Thus, might vitamin D supplements help prevent respiratory tract infections?

This study

The researchers analyzed data from 25 studies, involving 11,321 people, including children and adults as old as 95. They had been randomly assigned to take vitamin D supplements or a placebo daily or weekly, with some participants also getting occasional large doses. Overall, people taking vitamin D supplements were 12 percent less likely to have developed an acute respiratory infection — such as a cold, bronchitis or pneumonia — than were those who did not take the vitamin. People diagnosed as deficient in vitamin D at the start of their study experienced the strongest effect, with their odds of having a respiratory tract infection cut nearly in half. Occasional large doses, however, were not associated with a reduction in risk for respiratory infection, regardless of whether recipients had normal or deficient vitamin D levels.

Who may be affected?

Anyone who takes vitamin D supplements. The body needs vitamin D to help absorb calcium, giving it a critical role in keeping bones healthy and preventing such diseases as osteoporosis. It also helps the immune system fight off bacteria and viruses and helps muscles and nerves do their jobs. The body creates vitamin D naturally from sunlight absorbed through the skin. Besides supplements, other sources include foods that contain vitamin D (such as egg yolks, salmon and liver) and foods that have been fortified with the vitamin (nearly all milk and some kinds of cereal, orange juice and yogurt).

Caveats

The vitamin D dosage varied among the studies, and the analysis did not determine a most effective dose relative to respiratory infections.

Find this study

Online in the BMJ ([bmj.com](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__www.bmj.com_content_356_bmj.i6583&d=DwQFAg&c=RAhzPLrCAq19eJdrcQiUVEwFYoMRqGDAXQ_puw5tYjg&r=GgivkKNHTVnLjjXi-z78EdTOTAei-Qk2cgtA-vxxZao&m=upSDSw-YHnCrQRee8FpXwjH8qsLOEtRkUCue22TQxlM&s=Hk-nVrOGOYOASkvjP9J2H8lJdWdXG8wzIp6cZAI9cqY&e=); search for “respiratory infection and vitamin D”).

Learn more about

Information on vitamin D is available at[ods.od.nih.gov](https://ods.od.nih.gov/) (click on “Dietary Supplement Fact Sheets”) and [hsph.harvard.edu](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__hsph.harvard.edu&d=DwQFAg&c=RAhzPLrCAq19eJdrcQiUVEwFYoMRqGDAXQ_puw5tYjg&r=GgivkKNHTVnLjjXi-z78EdTOTAei-Qk2cgtA-vxxZao&m=upSDSw-YHnCrQRee8FpXwjH8qsLOEtRkUCue22TQxlM&s=yQC3-jvV9KARrhV4B7wqI_fLlFL2ar6TjgIJMl8vvnY&e=) (search for “vitamin D and health”).

*The research described in Quick Study comes from credible, peer-reviewed journals.*