

Health & Well-being

RoodlaneMedical
part of HCA Healthcare UK

Dr Gill's Blog



I recently watched a TED talk by David McCandless called "The beauty of data visualisation". I loved it because it was all about clear communication which is something I am fascinated by; most of

what is wrong in life can be resolved by people actually understanding each other. Not everything can, but if we recognise how differently each of us sees the world and begin to explain things well, we can make a start.

He showed a great "balloon race" chart about foods, supplements and the level of evidence to support them and there it was, right near the top - Vitamin D (accompanied by green tea) Do watch it, great talk.

So, in keeping with the theme of the newsletter and the fading light and falling temperature I wanted to share a few of the facts we know about Vitamin D.

Let's start with how common deficiency is and why: UK studies suggest half of us are deficient and one in six is severely deficient. This matches Roodlane screening data so is probably about right. It is not surprising: in modern life most of us spend too much time indoors and in the winter, the few hours of daylight make things worse, and it is too cold, for me at least, to expose skin to light. In fact the sun between October and March is not strong enough to allow us to make

Excessive amounts can be harmful and cause raised blood calcium levels. As with all Vitamins, stick to a safe intake.

The well-known and unarguably evidenced health issues are bone health but Vitamin D affects much more than that from immunity through to brain function and the risk of cancer. The body of research is steadily growing. Here are some of the emerging facts:

Vitamin D affects immunity in adults and children. A new study shows that newborns with severe vitamin D deficiency at birth have double the risk of a respiratory infection in the first three months of life.

Recent research in Finland shows that low Vit D levels are linked to gum disease. A further study in Norway showed that those from the north are more likely to lose teeth than those in the south of the country and postulates light exposure as an issue.

Vitamin D may also affect heart health with one study of almost 1500 individuals showing those with low Vit D 32% likelier to have cardiovascular disease.

Other studies link low Vitamin D to breast and prostate cancer.

Vitamin D.

Between March and October moderate sun exposure will allow us to manufacture adequate Vitamin D but sun screen will prevent this, as will covering up. Fair skinned people will need less time in the sun to create Vitamin D, typical advice is that we need less than the time taken for the skin to redden. Not very long.

Outside of these months Vitamin D can be found in oily fish, egg yolks, milk and fortified foods and can be taken as a supplement of 10 micro grams or 400 IU.



The link between health and an outdoor life and light is intuitive. Increasingly, the facts show that as with so many aspects of our health we need to look at our evolution and how much time we would have spent in daylight in historic times. Enough to start the winter with healthy levels of Vitamin D.

Looking after your Lifestyle

Feel like hibernating? You're not alone.

It's that time of the year when we see a lot of change. A change in the clocks, daylight and weather. This can impact us on varying levels and can make us feel flat, lethargic and result in a weakened immune system. These types of symptoms can be referred to as the 'Winter Blues' or, it's official name: Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). The root causes of SAD are not fully understood but the reduced amount of light in the winter does have significance. It's more common in the winter months, generally between September-April and particularly severe during December through to January.

The NHS estimates 1 in every 15 of us will experience SAD, with the change in seasons having an impact on our mood and energy levels. This can be to a point where it has such a significant effect on our mood, appetite and energy levels that it can impact how we function on a day to day basis. Others may experience a milder version called sub-syndromal SAD or 'winter blues'. This is very common and many people see it as a natural part of living somewhere with



[Cognitive Behavioural Therapy](#) (CBT) can help winter depression and reduce the risk of this returning in future winters.

Given the lack of sunshine we experience during the winter months, we also need to ensure we are getting a sufficient amount of Vitamin D in our diets. Many people are likely to have levels between 25 and 50 ng/mL which is categorised as insufficient and require supplements to boost the level in your blood count.

Public Health England recommend everyone

large variations between seasons.

The symptoms of SAD are similar to that of depression although not all are directly linked. These can include:

- Disturbed sleep
- Overeating (craving for carbohydrates and sweet foods)
- Apathy (loss of motivation and ability to concentrate)
- Mood changes
- Anxiety
- Lack of interest and enjoyment in life

SAD is common in women during the years when they can have children and are also around three times more likely to be affected by SAD than men.

There are many ways to manage SAD and treatment can vary from self-help, cognitive behavioural therapy, [light therapy](#), and medication.

gets 10 micrograms of vitamin D a day. While diet can't provide all your vitamin D, it can add a very useful increase to your levels.

Oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and herring provide one of the best sources of Vitamin D.

Eggs also provide an excellent top-up. The Department of Health confirm that a large egg contains just under 2mcg of Vitamin D, 70 percent more than 30 years ago. The increase is owing to hens being given feed fortified with vitamin D.

Red meat, breakfast cereals and some yoghurt and dairy drinks also have additional vitamin D.

For further information please see your GP. We offer a wide range of psychological support to help compliment and support client wellbeing programmes. To discuss how we can support your requirements, please contact us.

Doctors Corner

“My company runs a clinic around this time of year for flu vaccinations. I have never had the flu vaccination before last year I became very unwell with the flu and was off work for a week as a result”



How do you catch the Flu ?

Flu (influenza) is passed from person to person by droplets created when someone with the infection sneezes or coughs. You can also catch it by touching a surface where the virus has been deposited. Flu can spread quickly in these ways.

Can antibiotics help if I catch the Flu ?

Antibiotics kill germs called bacteria, but not viruses. Therefore, they are **not** routinely prescribed for viral illnesses such as flu or flu-like illnesses. However, they may be used if a complication develops like a chest infection caused by a germ (bacterium) or pneumonia.

Would you advise me to get it this year ?

Flu can be unpleasant, but if you are otherwise healthy it will usually clear up on its own within a week.

However, flu can be more severe in certain people, such as:

- anyone aged 65 and over
- pregnant women
- children and adults with an underlying health condition (particularly long-term heart or respiratory disease)
- children and adults with weakened immune systems

How effective is the Flu vaccination ?

Flu vaccine is the best protection we have against an unpredictable virus that can cause unpleasant illness in children and severe illness and death among at-risk groups, including older people, pregnant women and those with an underlying medical health condition.

Studies have shown that the flu jab does work and will help prevent you getting the flu. It won't stop all flu viruses and the level of protection may vary between people, so it's not a 100% guarantee that you'll be flu-free, but if you do get flu after vaccination it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been.

Over time, protection from the injected flu vaccine gradually decreases and flu strains often change. So new flu vaccines are produced each year which is why people advised to have the flu jab need it every year too.

Are there any side effects from the Flu jab ?

Serious side effects of the injected flu vaccine are very rare. You may have a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days after having the jab, and your arm may be a bit sore where you were injected. If you feel any of these side effects we would advise that you take regular paracetamol for a 24 to 48hrs until these symptoms resolve.

When should I have the Flu jab ?

The best time to have a flu vaccine is in the autumn, from the beginning of October to early November, but don't worry if you've missed it, you can have the vaccine later in winter.



Do you have a health related question?

Why not try emailing us in confidence and you could see your question answered by a qualified Doctor in our next newsletter!

Email: DoctorsQuestions@roodlane.co.uk

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