



Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Wednesday 22 July 2015

News story

SACN publish draft recommendations on vitamin D for public consultation

Today the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN), an independent body of experts, published draft recommendations on vitamin D for public consultation.

The draft report includes an extensive review of the available evidence on vitamin D and health and highlights the importance of vitamin D in protecting musculoskeletal health. SACN also looked at possible links between vitamin D and non-musculoskeletal health outcomes including cancer, type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis and heart disease but found insufficient evidence to draw any firm conclusions.

In order to protect musculoskeletal health in the UK population, SACN is recommending that blood concentration of 25(OH)D¹ should not fall below 25nmol/L at any time of year. To avoid this, SACN is proposing a dietary intake of 10micrograms of vitamin D per day for every one aged above 1 year (and 8.5-10 micrograms/day for those under 1 year).

SACN was not able to recommend how much sunlight exposure people would need in order to achieve vitamin D blood levels of 25 nmol/litre because there are many factors that affect vitamin D production in the skin.

[Current government advice](#) is that at-risk groups should take a daily vitamin D supplement. These groups are pregnant and breastfeeding women, babies and children aged 6 months to five years, adults aged 65 and over, people who do not expose their skin to sunlight or are confined indoors for long periods of time and people who have darker skin such as people of African, Afro-Caribbean and South Asian origin. This advice will remain until SACN has considered any consultation responses and then submitted its final recommendations to government.

Professor Hilary Powers, chair of the SACN Vitamin D working group, said:

“We look forward to comments on the scientific aspects of the report from stakeholders such as academics, NGOs, charities, industry representatives and members of the public. These will help shape the final recommendations and ensure the transparency and integrity of the report.”

¹ 25(OH)D is an indicator of exposure to vitamin D from sunlight and diet

The consultation period is nine weeks and lasts until **Wednesday 23rd September 2015**. The consultation document can be found on the [SACN website](#). SACN will carefully consider all the comments received during the consultation and intends to publish its final report in early 2016.

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Notes to editors:

1. SACN is a committee of independent experts that advises Government on matters relating to diet, nutrition and health. In 2001, SACN succeeded COMA. Details of the committee, including working procedures and membership, are found at www.sacn.gov.uk.
2. SACN is chaired by Dr Ann Prentice, Director of Medical Research Council Human Nutrition Research in Cambridge. The SACN Working Group on Vitamin D is chaired by Hilary Powers who is Professor of Nutritional Biochemistry in the Human Nutrition Unit at the University of Sheffield.
3. SACN were asked by the Department of Health in 2010 to examine the latest evidence on the links between vitamin D blood levels and a range of health outcomes – such as musculoskeletal health, heart disease, type 1 diabetes, cancer and multiple sclerosis – to ensure the government's advice was up to date.
4. The committee's main draft proposal is a new reference nutrient intake (RNI²) of 10µg/day of vitamin D for the UK population aged 1 year and over. This is the amount needed for 97.5% of the population to maintain a serum 25(OH)D concentration of 25 nmol/L³ when ultraviolet radiation B (UVB) sunshine exposure is minimal.
 - The RNI of 10µg/d proposed for the whole UK population includes individuals from minority ethnic groups with darker skin.
 - Data are insufficient to set RNIs for infants and children aged 0-3 years. As a precaution, a 'safe intake'⁴ of vitamin D is set for these ages: in the range 8.5-10 µg/day for ages 0 to <1 year (including exclusively breast fed infants); and 10 µg/day for ages 1 to <4 years.
5. Vitamin D plays an important role in the regulation of calcium and phosphate in the body. It is therefore essential for bone health. Without adequate vitamin D, bones can become thin, brittle and misshapen. In extreme cases this can lead to rickets in children, a condition involving a softening of the bones that can lead to fractures and deformity. In adults softening of the bones is called osteomalacia, and may cause pain and muscle weakness.
6. SACN looked at low bone mineral density, as an indicator of bone strength, and also at fracture risk.
7. Free supplements containing vitamin D are available to pregnant women and children up to the age of 4 from low-income families as part of the government's [Healthy Start scheme](#).

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²The RNI is the amount of a nutrient that is sufficient to meet the needs of most (97.5%) of the population.

³ Serum 25(OH)D concentration is an indicator of exposure to vitamin D (i.e., from the diet and skin synthesis). In order to protect musculoskeletal health, SACN is recommending that the serum 25(OH)D concentration of individuals in the UK should not fall below 25 nmol/L at any time of the year.

⁴ COMA (DH, 1991) set a Safe Intake for some nutrients if there were insufficient reliable data to set DRVs. Safe Intakes are based on a precautionary approach and reflect the insecurities of the data. They are set on grounds of prudence and are 'judged to be a level or range of intake at which there is no risk of deficiency and below a level of where there is a risk of undesirable effects'.