

# How Vitamin D3 Helps Fight Cavities

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February 06, 2025

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Vitamin D3, synthesized from sunlight, plays a key role in oral health by promoting the remineralization of weakened tooth enamel, helping to reverse early-stage cavities and strengthen teeth
- › Research demonstrates that vitamin D3 improves calcium absorption and availability, which are essential for the natural repair and strengthening of tooth enamel, thus reducing cavity risk
- › Epidemiological research reveals a correlation between low vitamin D levels in adolescents and an increased risk of developing cavities, highlighting the importance of adequate vitamin D for dental health
- › Vitamin D contributes to healthy tooth development even before birth and strengthens your body's defenses against cavity-causing bacteria by boosting antimicrobial proteins in saliva
- › Maintaining optimal vitamin D levels through sun exposure or supplementation, combined with consistent oral hygiene practices, is essential for protecting and maintaining a healthy, strong smile

Remember that sharp pain while biting down on popcorn? Or the dreaded dentist visit with the news of a cavity? Cavities, also known as dental caries, are a common problem affecting people of all ages. These tiny holes in your teeth are caused by a breakdown of tooth enamel, the hard outer layer protecting your teeth. Cavities are often painful, expensive to treat and ultimately lead to tooth loss.

But here's some good news: research suggests a surprising ally in the fight against cavities – vitamin D3, also known as the sunshine vitamin.<sup>1</sup> Vitamin D3 is a unique nutrient. Unlike most vitamins we get from food, your body synthesizes vitamin D3 from sunlight exposure. It's like having a built-in vitamin factory on your skin. When sunlight hits your skin, a chemical reaction occurs that leads to the production of vitamin D3.

**Vitamin D3** plays an important role in overall health, keeping your bones strong, your immune system functioning properly and your muscles working well. It also helps your body absorb calcium, which is necessary for building and maintaining strong bones.

But why are vitamin D deficiencies so common? Several factors contribute. Limited sun exposure due to our indoor lifestyles, especially during winter months or in regions with less sunlight, hinder vitamin D production.

Certain skin pigments, particularly darker skin tones, require more sun exposure to produce the same amount of vitamin D. Even some health conditions interfere with vitamin D absorption or metabolism. If your levels are low, your overall health – and your oral health – will suffer.

## **How Cavities Ruin Your Teeth**

Your teeth are like a fortified castle. The hard outer layer, the enamel, acts like a strong shield protecting the softer inner structures from invaders. Enamel is the hardest substance in the human body, made mostly of minerals like calcium and phosphate. This strong shield protects the more vulnerable dentin and pulp layers beneath.

But these invaders aren't knights; they're microscopic bacteria that love sugary foods and drinks. When these bacteria build up as plaque on your teeth, they produce acid. Think of plaque as a sticky film that constantly forms on your teeth. When you eat sugary foods or drinks, the bacteria in plaque feast on these sugars and release acids as a byproduct.

This acid erodes the enamel, leading to a process called demineralization, where essential minerals like calcium are lost, weakening your shield. This is how cavities form

– tiny breaches in the enamel that deepen and cause pain if left untreated.

If the demineralization continues, the enamel breaks down, forming a cavity. Brushing twice a day removes plaque while flossing helps remove food particles hidden between teeth. However, optimizing your vitamin D levels is another important strategy to reduce your cavity risk.

## **Vitamin D3 Helps Build Strong Teeth**

When your enamel starts to weaken due to demineralization, a process called remineralization helps reverse the damage. Remineralization is like repairing cracks in a wall. Minerals like calcium are deposited back into the enamel, strengthening it and even reversing early-stage cavities. This process maintains the integrity of your teeth and prevents further decay.

Research suggests that vitamin D3 plays a key role in this process. A study published in *Cureus* investigated the effects of oral vitamin D3 on remineralization of early enamel lesions.<sup>2</sup> The researchers used extracted premolars and created artificial caries-like lesions on their enamel surfaces. They then exposed these teeth to saliva collected from volunteers who had taken 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 supplements daily for varying periods (three and six weeks).

The researchers compared these results to teeth exposed to saliva from the same volunteers before they started taking the supplements, as well as control groups (one with healthy enamel and one exposed to demineralization only). The study measured two key aspects: microhardness of the enamel surface and the weight percentage of calcium (Ca) and phosphorus (P), the main minerals in teeth.

They used a Vickers microhardness machine to assess the surface hardness, a measure of how resistant the enamel is to damage. They also used X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry, a technique that precisely measures the amount of different elements in a sample, to quantify the calcium and phosphorus content.

The study found that teeth exposed to saliva from the vitamin D3 supplemented volunteers showed a significant increase in both microhardness and Ca and P content compared to those exposed to saliva collected before supplementation. This indicated that the saliva from the vitamin D3 group promoted better remineralization.

This study provided evidence that oral vitamin D3 supplementation indirectly enhances the remineralization of early caries lesions.<sup>3</sup> By improving calcium absorption and availability, vitamin D3 supports the natural repair processes of tooth enamel. This means that having adequate vitamin D levels is beneficial for protecting and strengthening teeth.

## **Vitamin D's Role in Adolescent Dental Health**

While I've discussed the importance of vitamin D3 for remineralization at a microscopic level, it's also important to look at the bigger picture. A systematic review published in the *Dentistry Journal* examined multiple studies on the link between vitamin D levels and cavities in adolescents with permanent teeth.<sup>4</sup> This type of review is valuable because it combines the findings of many different studies, providing a broader understanding of the topic.

The researchers analyzed eight studies conducted across various countries, including the U.S., Portugal, the United Kingdom, Qatar, South Korea, China and Korea. This wide range of locations is important because factors like diet, sun exposure and access to dental care vary significantly around the world.

All the studies they looked at were cross-sectional meaning they took a snapshot of people's health at one point in time. This is useful for finding associations, but it can't definitively prove that one thing causes another. Some of the studies showed a clear link between low vitamin D levels and a higher risk of cavities.

In fact, some studies showed that adolescents with insufficient vitamin D were more than twice as likely to develop cavities compared to those with sufficient levels. According to the researchers, "Our review suggests that improving vitamin D status

could be a beneficial component of preventive strategies against dental caries in children and adolescents.”<sup>5</sup>

## How Vitamin D Protects Developing Teeth

A narrative review published in the *European Journal of Pediatrics* sheds light on several key mechanisms by which vitamin D helps protect teeth, especially in children.<sup>6</sup> This type of review gathers information from a wide range of studies to provide a comprehensive overview of a topic.

One important point highlighted in the review is the effect of vitamin D even before a child is born. Teeth begin to develop very early in pregnancy, and vitamin D plays a role in this process. If a mother is deficient in **vitamin D during pregnancy**, it leads to defects in the baby's developing teeth, making them more susceptible to cavities later in life. This emphasizes the importance of pregnant women maintaining adequate vitamin D levels.

Beyond its role in tooth development, vitamin D also strengthens your body's natural defenses against cavity-causing bacteria. It does this by boosting the production of antimicrobial proteins, which are like tiny warriors that fight off harmful microbes in your mouth. One of these warriors, called cathelicidin, is particularly effective at targeting *Streptococcus mutans*, a key bacteria involved in cavity formation.

Studies have shown that children with sufficient vitamin D levels have higher levels of cathelicidin in their saliva, providing them with extra protection against cavities. Finally, the review highlights the importance of saliva in maintaining oral health. Saliva helps wash away food particles and neutralize acids produced by bacteria. It also contains minerals like calcium and phosphorus that help repair enamel.

Vitamin D plays a role in maintaining healthy saliva flow and composition. When vitamin D levels are low, saliva production decreases, and its mineral content is often reduced, making teeth more vulnerable to decay. This review concludes that vitamin D deficiency

is a risk factor for cavities in children, and optimal vitamin D levels during pregnancy and childhood is an additional preventive measure.

## Vitamin D and Gum Health

Beyond vitamin D's role in keeping your teeth strong and preventing cavities, it's also important for the health of your gums. A study published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* looked at the connection between vitamin D levels and periodontal disease, also known as **gum disease**.<sup>7</sup> This study, conducted using data from a large national health survey in the U.S., included 11,202 adults aged 20 and older.

Periodontal disease is a serious infection that damages the soft tissues and bone that support your teeth. It leads to gum recession, loose teeth and even tooth loss, as well as systemic effects throughout your body. The researchers in this study measured something called "periodontal attachment loss," which is a sign of how much damage gum disease has caused. They also measured the participants' vitamin D levels.

What they found was interesting: in adults aged 50 and older, there was a clear link between vitamin D levels and gum health. People with lower vitamin D levels tended to have more attachment loss, meaning they had more severe gum disease. This link was seen in both men and women.

Now, you might be wondering if this is because vitamin D is important for bone health in general, and gum disease is related to bone loss in the jaw. While that's a good question, the researchers also looked at bone density and found that it didn't fully explain the connection.

This suggests that vitamin D might be helping gum health in other ways, perhaps by reducing inflammation, which is a key part of gum disease. This study gives you another reason to make sure you're getting enough vitamin D. Not only might it help keep your teeth strong and prevent cavities, but it could also play a role in **maintaining healthy gums**, especially as you get older.

# The Importance of Vitamin D3 for a Healthy Smile

**Sunlight** remains the most effective way for your body to produce vitamin D, offering benefits beyond just vitamin production. However, it's essential to approach sun exposure with caution, especially considering the impact of dietary seed oils.

Seed oils, high in **linoleic acid** (LA), react negatively with ultraviolet radiation, causing inflammation and DNA damage. If you regularly consume these oils, it's advisable to moderate sun exposure, particularly during peak hours around solar noon – roughly 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. during Daylight Saving Time.

After eliminating seed oils for four to six months (though full tissue clearance takes about two years), gradually increase your sun exposure, beginning with the gentler rays of early morning or late afternoon.

Individual factors like skin pigmentation and body composition also influence how your skin responds to the sun; those with darker skin require longer exposure for vitamin D synthesis, while individuals with higher body fat percentages need to be more cautious because oxidized seed oils stored in fat tissue extends the risk period even after dietary changes.

The “sunburn test” – monitoring your skin for redness and avoiding sunburn – is a simple way to gauge safe exposure. If sun exposure is unavoidable before LA clearance, consider protective measures such as 12 milligrams of daily **astaxanthin supplementation**, topical niacinamide application, taking a baby aspirin 30 to 60 minutes before exposure or utilizing **molecular hydrogen**.

For those who cannot obtain sufficient vitamin D from the sun, supplementation is a viable option. Aim for optimal vitamin D levels between 60 and 80 ng/mL (150 to 200 nmol/L), rather than simply avoiding deficiency (below 20 ng/mL).

Regular monitoring is key: test your levels twice yearly, adjust sun exposure or supplementation based on the results and retest after three to four months to confirm

you've reached your target. It's important to remember that everyone's response to the sun is unique.

Pay attention to your body's signals and adjust your exposure accordingly, prioritizing the benefits of sunlight while minimizing the risk of sunburn. By combining sensible sun exposure practices and, when necessary, targeted supplementation, you effectively optimize your vitamin D status and contribute to both overall and oral health.

Maintaining optimal vitamin D levels, alongside [good oral hygiene](#), is a valuable step in protecting your smile for years to come.

## Sources and References

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- <sup>1, 2, 3</sup> [Cureus 14\(5\): e25360. doi: 10.7759/cureus.25360](#)
- <sup>4, 5</sup> [Dentistry Journal 2024, 12\(4\), 117](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [European Journal of Pediatrics November 15, 2023, Volume 183, pages 523-528, Conclusion](#)
- <sup>7</sup> [The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Volume 80, Issue 1, July 2004, pages 108-113, Discussion](#)