

# **Vitamin D – Advice following a melanoma diagnosis**

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, or if you have any questions  
please contact the skin cancer specialist nurses on  
01904 721719



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## **Why have I been given this leaflet?**

You have recently received a diagnosis of melanoma. This leaflet provides advice on protecting yourself from the sun, which can cause melanoma, while at the same time ensuring you maintain adequate vitamin D levels. Vitamin D is a hormone, produced in response to sun absorption and is essential for general health and wellbeing.

# Sun Protection and vitamin D

Following your melanoma diagnosis you will have been advised to reduce your sun exposure. This will reduce your body's capacity to produce vitamin D.

It is important to protect your skin from sun damage for the following reasons:

- Sunburn may affect your body's natural defences against melanoma by preventing the immune system from functioning effectively.
- Sun exposure will increase the risk of developing a further melanoma. 1 in 10 melanoma patients will go on to develop further melanomas.

Vitamin D plays an important role in the maintenance of healthy bones and muscles. It is also thought to have other positive effects, such as benefits for the immune system, improving mood and energy levels.

It is advisable for melanoma patients to maintain their vitamin D level within an optimal range of 50 – 90 nmol/L

# What should I do to keep myself safe?

- Avoid long periods of direct exposure to the sun's harmful ultra violet rays.
- Avoid tanning and sunburn.
- Avoid sunbed use.
- Avoid the sun between the hours of 11.00hrs and 15.00hrs, seeking shade where possible.
- Use a sun cream with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or above and a UVA star rating of four or more stars.
- Use protective clothing to protect your skin where possible, such as long sleeves and a wide brimmed hat.
- Have your vitamin D level checked by your hospital team (not your GP). Advised vitamin D levels in melanoma patients differ to that of the general public.
- Find out if you need a vitamin D supplement or if you need to stop the supplement you are already taking.

# What is an adequate vitamin D level?

- Very low levels – equal to or less than 25nmol/L.
- Moderately low levels – more than 25nmol/L but less than 50nmol/L.
- Ideal levels – between 50-90nmol/L.

Levels above 90nmol/L are considered to be high. This may be a result of having a recent sunny holiday. In this instance, the level should come down gradually over a relatively short period of time.

If you have not been on a sunny holiday and are not taking Vitamin D capsules and your level is high, this may be because you are getting vitamin D from other sources. These sources include multivitamins, cod liver oil, fish oil, supplemented cereals or yoghurts or fatty fish etc,

Where levels are higher than 90nmol/L due to taking vitamin D supplementation then the supplements should be stopped. High levels of vitamin D can lead to excessive amounts of calcium being released into the blood stream. This, in turn, may lead to calcium deposits within the arteries and soft tissues throughout the body.

## **What is the advice if my blood levels are low?**

If your vitamin D level is low you will be advised to take vitamin D3 supplements (without added calcium). These can be obtained over the counter at any supermarket, health food shop or pharmacy.

Patients with low vitamin D levels (less than 50nmol/L) will be advised to commence a vitamin D3 supplement. You will be advised to purchase vitamin D3 capsules containing a vitamin D dose of 400 IU (10mcg). Your consultant or clinical nurse specialist will advise you how many capsules to take. A repeat blood test will then be done 3-6 months later to ensure your vitamin D levels have reached the required level.

If you are going on a holiday abroad and don't cover your skin you should stop taking the vitamin D capsules during and for 4-6 weeks after your holiday. Your skin will manufacture sufficient levels of vitamin D during this period.

If your blood test shows normal levels then no supplementation is required. However if the blood test was done straight after a holiday then your bloods should be rechecked in six months to ensure that the level hasn't fallen.



## **What is the advice for families?**

If you have been affected by melanoma this results in a higher risk for direct relatives also. This is because melanoma is more likely to occur in people with fair skin that burns easily and those that have lots of moles. As similar skin types tend to run through families this increases risk within these families.

Families also tend to share similar lifestyle choices, for example, outdoor hobbies or working which may also result in an increased risk throughout a family.

National guidance for the UK population is for all residents aged 5 to adult, unless advised otherwise for medical reasons, to take a 400IU (10mgc) supplement throughout the winter months (November – March) for general health and wellbeing. For further advice please see [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Emily Shephard  
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## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

# **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format

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