What is Vitamin D?
Vitamin D is sometimes referred to as the “sunshine vitamin”. It is not actually a vitamin at all but a prohormone that we obtain through sun exposure. Through a series of events, Vitamin D is produced by our body with the assistance of sunlight. It is possible to get some vitamin D in our food, however there are very few natural sources and only a few foods that have been fortified.

What is so important about Vitamin D?
It’s long been known that having adequate vitamin D helps to build bone strength by increasing calcium absorption. Recent research has shown that getting enough Vitamin D has additional benefits by reducing the risk of deadly cancers, cardiovascular disease, multiples sclerosis, depression, rheumatoid arthritis, and type 1 diabetes.

How do I get Vitamin D?
Fish and fortified foods are the main sources of dietary Vitamin D. The following is a list of food sources with natural occurring Vitamin D:

- **Fish liver oils**, such as cod liver oil, 1 Tbs. provides 1,360 IU
- **Fatty fish species**, such as:
  - Herring, 85g (3 oz) provides 1383 IU
  - Catfish, 85g (3 oz) provides 425 IU
  - Salmon, cooked, 3.5 oz provides 360 IU
  - Mackerel, cooked, 3.5 oz, 345 IU
  - Sardines, canned in oil, drained, 1.75 oz, 250 IU
  - Tuna, canned in oil, 3 oz, 200 IU
  - Eel, cooked, 3.5 oz, 200 IU
- **Mushrooms** provide over 2700 IU per serving (approx. 3 oz or 1/2 cup) of vitamin D₂; if exposed to just 5 minutes of UV light after being harvested;¹⁸ this is one of a few natural food-based sources of vitamin D for vegans.
- **One whole egg**, 20 IU
Foods fortified with Vitamin D include milk, yogurt, margarine, breakfast cereal, oil spreads, pastries, and bread.

It is suggested that sensible sun exposure (without sunscreen) of 5-10 minutes of exposure 2 or more times per week can safely increase your Vitamin D levels. However, due to the many factors that can reduce sunlight’s ability to produce vitamin D (i.e. the angle of the sun, skin pigment, and use of sunscreen), it is easier and more reliable to get your recommended Vitamin D from a supplement.

Many experts in the field of nutrition recommend a daily supplement of 1000 IU. It is best to use the D3 form (cholecalciferol) and take it with a fat-containing meal to ensure absorption. Keep in mind that the body will make 10,000 to 20,000 IU per day with moderate exposure to the summer sun, which means there are no concerns about toxicity with 1,000 IU of supplemental vitamin D.

Bottom line:

- 5-10 minutes of sun exposure, 2 or more times per week
- Eat fish (or other sources) with Vitamin D to increase your intake of this nutrient
- Take a Vitamin D supplement, 1,000 IU (Aging and dark skin can increase your need for Vitamin D. Be sure to ask your doctor how much you should take)

Resources:

- www.vitamindcouncil.org