

# Achieving True Vitamin D Sufficiency Cuts Breast Cancer Risk in Half

Contributing writer

[By Korin Miller](#)

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Korin Miller is a freelance writer specializing in general wellness, relationships, and lifestyle trends with a master's degree from American University. Her work has appeared in *Women's Health*, *Prevention*, *Self*, *Glamour*, and more.



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It's concerning enough that more than [40% of American adults<sup>1</sup>](#) meet the criteria for a clinical insufficiency in vitamin D (and a whopping [29%<sup>2</sup>](#) are straight-up deficient in the essential vitamin). But, disturbingly, a 2017 *Breast Cancer* review shows that [up to 96%<sup>3</sup>](#) of people diagnosed with breast cancer are [also deficient in vitamin D](#).

Vitamin D is known for a range of [health benefits](#), so it's understandable to wonder about your breast cancer risk as it relates to your vitamin D levels. But it's important to note upfront that, while the association between vitamin D and breast cancer risk exists, the research is not conclusive at this point. Meaning, there's nothing that says having lower vitamin D levels *causes* breast cancer—there's just an association. Here's what we know right now.

## The relationship between vitamin D status & breast cancer risk.

Some studies show a specific association between circulating vitamin D—i.e., 25(OH)D serum vitamin D levels—and breast cancer risk. For example, a 2015 study published in *Breast Cancer Research and Treatment* found that women who had circulating vitamin D levels below 20 ng/ml had a [27% higher risk](#) of breast cancer than those with sufficient vitamin D levels. (Worth noting: Clinical [vitamin D deficiency](#) is defined as levels below 20 ng/ml, while vitamin D sufficiency is defined as levels above [30 ng/ml](#).)

A meta-analysis published in *Anticancer Research* found that a circulating vitamin D level of 47 ng/ml lowered breast cancer risk by [50%<sup>6</sup>](#), suggesting that levels even above 30 ng/ml are the goal.

But, again, this association is still being studied at this point. "Research has shown that there is a relationship between low vitamin D and breast cancer risk," explains [Brian Czerniecki, M.D., Ph.D.](#), chair of the department of breast oncology at Moffitt Cancer Center. "However, data is lacking when showing that high levels are protective. More research is needed, and where vitamin D falls into the risk analysis is still unclear at this point." Still, he says, vitamin D deficiency "may be one of multiple factors raising the risk of breast cancer."

## How to reach and sustain optimal vitamin D levels.

Recommendations around vitamin D intake are a little confusing. While the recommended dietary allowance (RDA) from the National Academies for vitamin D is [600 IU](#) for most healthy adults, some [research<sup>7</sup>](#) suggests that you need a minimum of 3,000 IU of vitamin D3 a day to get a total serum 25(OH)D (the clinical biomarker of your body's vitamin D status) of 30 ng/ml, aka clinical sufficiency. Some leading wellness experts suggest that 30 ng/ml is still well below [truly optimal vitamin D levels](#) (i.e., 50 ng/ml).

"There's a lot of information suggesting that 600 IU—the current RDA for vitamin D— isn't enough to optimize your vitamin D status," says [Samantha Cassetty, M.S., R.D.](#), a nutrition and wellness expert and co-author of [Sugar Shock](#). It's possible to get vitamin D from salmon, egg yolks, certain mushrooms, and fortified milk, but many plant-based milks aren't fortified to the same degree as cow's milk. As a result, "vegans and vegetarians are at higher risk for vitamin D insufficiency," Cassetty says. Even if you eat animal products, it's hard to get enough vitamin D from [food and exposure to sunlight](#) (another vitamin D source) alone.

Ultimately, "most people tend to need a supplement for vitamin D," says [Jessica Cording, M.S., R.D., CDN](#), registered dietitian and author of [The Little Book of Game-Changers](#). When selecting a vitamin D supplement, Cording recommends looking for one with [vitamin D3](#). "It's the most absorbable form," she says, adding that she

especially likes formulations that [include plant-based fats](#), like olive oil, avocado oil, or flax oil.

As for dosage? Leading health experts recommend [5,000 IU daily](#) to reach truly optimal vitamin D status. "Factor in the vitamin D you're getting from all sources, such as your multivitamin and calcium supplements," Cassetty says. (To find a supplement that meets all of these criteria, check out mindbodygreen's roundup of the [best vitamin D supplements](#).)

## The takeaway.

There is an association between vitamin D status and breast cancer, but it's not a definitive link at this point.

If you're concerned about your vitamin D levels, talk to your doctor. They should be able to do a simple blood test to see where you stand and can make recommendations on how to increase your daily vitamin D intake from there.