

Information for staff



PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Awhina Hunga Whara

Vitamin D – A proven D-fence against falls

Helping your residents stay on their feet





Vitamin D: A proven D-fence against falls

Falls are an issue for older people living in residential care.

A fall will often result in serious injury, reduced mobility and a loss of confidence and independence. This can not only affect the individual's quality of life, but also increase the workload for nurses and caregivers.

ACC, DHBs and PHOs are supporting a programme aimed at reducing falls in residential facilities, by ensuring Vitamin D supplements are available to residents.

Vitamin D is a proven way to help reverse the muscle weakness that plays a part in many falls.

Reducing the impact of falls in residential care facilities

Around two-thirds of older adults living in residential care facilities have a fall each year.

That means a lot of staff time is spent dealing with falls, and providing the higher levels of assistance needed to residents who've lost their mobility, independence and confidence following a fall.

Reducing falls will therefore go a long way towards improving quality of life for residents, and easing the workload on facility staff.

How Vitamin D supplements can help

Enhancing muscle strength

Research has shown there is a clear association between low Vitamin D levels and reduced muscle strength, which contributes to many falls in older adults.

Vitamin D is a proven way to enhance muscle strength, by increasing both the number and size of fast twitch (Type II) muscle fibres.

Vitamin D can also help maintain bone density, by assisting calcium to be absorbed into the bones. This lessens the risk of fractures in those who do fall.

How many falls can we prevent?

It's estimated that Vitamin D supplements can prevent at least a quarter of the falls that currently happen in residential care facilities.

Around 27,000 people currently live in these facilities in New Zealand, which totals approximately 5,000 fewer falls each year.



Frequently asked questions



Are all residents eligible for Vitamin D supplements?

The supplements will be offered to all people living in a residential care facility.

Some residents may not be able to take them if they have certain medical conditions. However, the supplements will always be prescribed by a GP, who will determine residents' suitability for the supplements, by following a guideline developed by a Specialist Working Group of clinicians and researchers.

What form does the supplement take?

The supplements come in tablet form and will be prescribed by the resident's doctor.

How often do the supplements need to be taken?

Two tablets are taken together in the first month. After this, one tablet is taken monthly.

Frequently asked questions

Are there any known side-effects or will the supplements interfere with other medication?

Vitamin D supplements have no known side-effects, and can be safely combined with most medications.

Does everyone receive the same dose?

Yes.

Are there any other benefits of taking vitamin D supplements?

As well as helping to prevent falls, Vitamin D has also been shown to reduce the risk of developing many serious chronic illnesses, including rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, cardiovascular diseases, some cancers and diabetes.

Has Vitamin D supplementation been used anywhere else in the world to prevent falls?

Yes, Vitamin D is widely used for fall prevention in many countries around the world, including the USA and the UK.

If the resident takes Vitamin D supplements, does this mean they do not need to exercise?

If possible, exercise performed **safely** should still be undertaken even if the resident is taking Vitamin D supplements. Exercise has many benefits in addition to building muscle strength. It has been shown to assist in the maintenance of bone density, and has been linked to many positive health outcomes such as lower blood pressure, lower rates of diabetes and an increased quality of life.

Need more information?

If you have any questions about the programme, please talk to your facility or nurse manager.

You can also find out more about the programme:

- at www.acc.co.nz/vitamin-d
- or by calling 0800 844 657.



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www.acc.co.nz

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