



Let the sun shine in

Make sure your apartment lets in plenty of sunlight, says *Title* health editor Tania Flack, and spend some time on the balcony too.

Who doesn't love walking into a light-filled apartment? The rooms feel fresh, airy and welcoming, and our mood instantly lifts. And the reasons for this may have more to do with our physiology than we think.

Our brain registers our exposure to natural light and uses this information to set our body clock, which is called the circadian rhythm. This dictates our level of alertness and activity during the day and our ability to unwind and relax at night. In a healthy system, the brain will secrete a hormone at night called melatonin which is involved in sleep.

Studies show that people who have limited exposure to natural light

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may have difficulty regulating their circadian rhythm, which can contribute to insomnia and broken sleep. Most people spend their working life indoors under artificial lighting, which makes it all the more important to have exposure to natural light at home.

In addition, vitamin D is produced in the skin when we are exposed to sunlight. While we can also get it in small amounts from some foods such as eggs and oily fish, vitamin D deficiency is becoming increasingly common in Australia - a major concern as it's vital for the immune system, bone health, cell regulation, inflammation and even cancer prevention.



Although it depends on your skin type and the area of Australia you live in, exposing your face, arms and hands to natural sunlight for short periods each day will help to support healthy vitamin D levels. So if you have a balcony or large window in your apartment, you should sit in the sunlight to maximise your vitamin D levels.

Low exposure to sunlight can also cause Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression. People suffering SAD may experience low moods, a lack of energy, sleep too much, over-eat, gain weight and crave carbohydrates. While this is more common in Europe during long

winters, it may also affect people working long hours in artificial light.

Don't forget, either, that dark, poorly ventilated rooms are inviting places for common household mould and fungus to grow. Spores are then released into the air and can act as allergens for some people, triggering respiratory symptoms or causing immune system irritation.

Natural light has a profound effect on our physiology and directly impacts our wellbeing on many levels, so maximise your exposure to natural light in the home where you can. **T**

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