



Vitamin and Mineral Supplements for Adults

What are the best sources of vitamins and minerals?

Foods are the best sources of nutrients, including vitamins and minerals. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide shows you how much you need from the different food groups to meet your daily nutritional needs. It is also important to eat a variety of foods in each food group.

Each food is a unique “package” of nutrients. Two examples include:

- A glass of milk provides protein, calcium, vitamins D and A, vitamin B12 and riboflavin, and other nutrients.
- An orange provides vitamin C, folate, potassium, calcium, fibre, and phytochemicals which are natural substances in plant foods with many health benefits.

Some people can get enough vitamins and minerals through food alone. Others need vitamin and mineral supplements. If you eat a healthy diet, taking a daily multivitamin/mineral supplement may be all you need to do.

When might you need supplements?

You may need to add vitamin and/or mineral supplements or fortified foods at different stages in life, or if your food choices are limited. Fortified foods have vitamins and/or minerals added to them.

Women

Folic acid helps to prevent neural tube defects when taken before and during the first 3 months of pregnancy. Women 14 to 50 years of age who could become pregnant and those who are pregnant or breastfeeding need to take a multivitamin/mineral supplement with 0.4 milligrams (400 micrograms) of folic acid every day. In addition, regularly include food sources of

folate such as dried beans, peas, lentils, dark green leafy vegetables, and orange juice.

Pregnant women also need to ensure their multivitamin/mineral supplement has 16-20 milligrams of iron to meet their increased needs. Good sources of iron are meat, shellfish, fish, poultry, iron enriched cereals and breads, lentils and dried beans.

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, speak with your doctor before choosing a multivitamin/mineral supplement.

For more information, see HealthLink BC Files: [#38c Pregnancy and Nutrition: Spina Bifida and Folic Acid](#)

[#68g Folate and Your Health](#)

[#68c Iron and Your Health](#)

[#68d Iron in Foods](#)

Adults over 50 Years of Age

Adults over 50 years of age absorb less vitamin B12 from foods and need to take vitamin B12 fortified foods or a supplement. Multivitamin/mineral supplements contain enough vitamin B12 to meet daily needs. Vitamin B12 is naturally found in all animal foods – milk and alternatives, meats, fish, poultry and eggs. Meatless protein alternatives, such as meatless deli slices and soy burgers, are often fortified with vitamin B12.

A daily supplement with 400 IU vitamin D is also recommended for adults over 50 years of age, in addition to following Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. Dietary sources of vitamin D include milk and fortified soy beverages and orange juice, and higher fat fish such as salmon and sardines.

Women over 50 years and men over 70 years of age need more calcium. Milk and alternatives,

such as calcium fortified soy drink or orange juice, are excellent sources of calcium.

For more information, see HealthLink BC Files: [#68j Healthy Eating and Healthy Aging for Adults](#) [#68e Food Sources of Calcium and Vitamin D](#)

Special Dietary Considerations

Some people need supplements because they do not eat foods from all four food groups as recommended in Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide.

Vegans, vegetarians who do not eat any animal products, need to eat vitamin B12 fortified foods or take a supplement. They may also find it difficult to meet their needs for iron, zinc, calcium, and vitamin D with foods, and they may wish to take a supplement that provides these nutrients.

Adults who do not use milk or calcium fortified milk alternatives may need calcium and vitamin D supplements. People with osteoporosis may also need more calcium. Multivitamin/mineral supplements do not contain enough calcium to meet daily needs.

People with poor appetites, or those with many food allergies or intolerances, should speak with a dietitian about their nutritional needs. A multivitamin/mineral supplement may help to fill the nutritional gaps in their diets.

What kind of supplement is best?

Multivitamin/mineral supplements can provide additional vitamins and minerals close to the daily recommended amounts for adults. The exception is calcium.

When choosing a multivitamin/mineral supplement, choose one for your age group and gender.

Unless recommended by your doctor or health professional, avoid buying individual vitamins and minerals. There is a risk of taking too many vitamins and minerals this way.

What about large amounts of vitamins and minerals?

People sometimes take large amounts of vitamin C hoping to prevent colds, or they take B vitamins to protect the body from the effects of mental stress. You can get enough of these vitamins from food and/or a multivitamin. Eating a balanced and varied diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables has been shown to improve overall health and immunity.

Are large amounts of vitamins and minerals ever needed?

Your doctor or dietitian may recommend that you take large amounts of some nutrients to treat a health concern or a diagnosed nutritional deficiency. For example, you may need an iron supplement if you have low iron. Speak with your doctor if you have any concerns about the prescribed amounts.

What should you look for when choosing supplements?

When you buy a vitamin and mineral supplement, always look for a Drug Identification Number (DIN) or Natural Product Number (NPN). These numbers tell you that the supplement meets Health Canada's standards.

For More Information

- HealthLink BC File [#68d Iron in Foods](#)
- Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. Visit www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

For more nutrition information, call 8-1-1 to speak with a registered dietitian.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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