



Vitamin and Mineral Supplements for Adults

What are the best sources of vitamins and minerals?

Food is the best source of nutrients, including vitamins and minerals. Different foods have different types and amounts of vitamins and minerals. For example, milk has a high amount of calcium, a small amount of vitamin C, and other nutrients like vitamins A, B12, and D. Oranges have a small amount of calcium, a high amount of vitamin C, and other nutrients like folate and potassium. Food also provides protein, fat, carbohydrate, fibre and other natural substances that benefit health.

Eating a variety of foods including vegetables, fruit, whole grains, milk and alternatives, and protein foods such as legumes, nuts and seeds, fish, and lean meats can help you meet your nutrient needs.

Many people get enough vitamins and minerals from food alone when they follow a balanced and varied diet. However, some people may need a vitamin or mineral supplement or both to help meet their needs. Ask your health care provider if you would benefit from a supplement.

When do I need a supplement?

You might need a vitamin or mineral supplement or both during certain stages of your life, if your food choices are limited, or if you have certain medical conditions.

Women

Folate is a B vitamin found in food. Getting enough folate before and during pregnancy supports the development of your baby's brain and spine.

The type of folate found in supplements is called folic acid. If you are of childbearing age or are already pregnant or breastfeeding, take a multivitamin supplement with 400 mcg (400µg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day. Make sure your

supplement contains vitamin B12. Continue to eat foods that have folate such as:

- Legumes like beans, chickpeas, and lentils
- Dark green leafy vegetables like spinach
- Grain products with added folic acid like enriched pastas and cereals

For more information on folate and pregnancy, see [HealthLink BC File #38c Pregnancy and Nutrition: Folate and Preventing Neural Tube Defects](#).

Some women may need more iron than others. Talk to your health care provider to find out how much iron is right for you.

Pregnant women need more iron to support the growth and development of their baby. Eating foods high in iron and taking 16 to 20 mg of iron per day from a supplement is recommended. Prenatal supplements often contain iron and folate in recommended amounts.

Foods high in iron include:

- Meat, poultry, shellfish, and fish
- Lentils and dried beans
- Iron enriched cereals
- Vegetables like spinach, swiss chard, green peas, asparagus and beet greens

Adults over 50 years of age

The need for vitamin D increases after the age of 50. It is recommended that adults over 50 take a daily vitamin D supplement of 400 IU (international units) and eat foods that have vitamin D including:

- Milk, powdered milk and unsweetened evaporated milk
- Soy beverages fortified with vitamin D

- Oily fish such as salmon and sardines

Adults over 50 are also recommended to take a vitamin B12 supplement or eat foods fortified with vitamin B12. As you age, your body absorbs less vitamin B12 from natural sources including milk and milk products, meats, fish, poultry and eggs. Foods fortified with vitamin B12 include:

- Some soy beverages
- Some meat alternatives like veggie burgers and meatless chicken, fish, and meatballs

Check the Nutrition Facts table on the food label to see if a food is fortified with vitamin B12. If vitamin B12 isn't listed, the food isn't fortified.

Special Dietary Considerations

People who do not eat animal products need to eat vitamin B12 fortified foods or take a supplement. Vitamin D needs may also be more difficult to meet and a supplement may be helpful.

People who do not drink milk, calcium fortified beverages, or eat foods high in calcium may need a calcium supplement. Multivitamin/mineral supplements do not have enough calcium to meet daily needs.

People with osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) may need calcium and/or vitamin D supplements to meet their needs.

People with food allergies or intolerances or who have a limited diet may need a vitamin or mineral supplement or both to help meet their needs.

Do I need a multivitamin/mineral (MVM) supplement if I'm not eating a healthy diet?

There may be benefits to taking a multivitamin/mineral (MVM) supplement when it's difficult to eat a balanced and varied diet.

Call **8-1-1** to discuss your food and nutrient needs with a dietitian. If you decide to take a MVM

supplement, a dietitian or pharmacist can help you choose one that has vitamins and minerals in recommended amounts to meet your needs.

Are large amounts of vitamins and minerals ever needed?

Not usually. Large amounts of some vitamins or minerals may be recommended to treat a specific health condition. For example, you may need an iron supplement if you have low iron in your blood.

Avoid taking large amounts of any vitamin or mineral unless your health care provider recommends it. These can add up to more than the safe limit or Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL). The UL is the maximum daily amount of a vitamin or mineral that is safe.

What should I look for when choosing supplements?

When you buy a vitamin and mineral supplement, look for a Natural Product Number (NPN). A NPN means that the supplement meets Health Canada's safety standards for Natural and Non-prescription Health Products. Check the expiration date. Do not buy supplements that have expired or will expire before you can finish the bottle.

For More Information

For more information see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #68c Iron and Your Health](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #68d Iron in Foods](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #68e Food Sources of Calcium and Vitamin D](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #68g Folate and Your Health](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #68j Healthy Eating and Healthy Aging for Adults](#)

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