

6 vitamins your body needs to stay healthy



Key vitamins to stay healthy



Content reviewed March 2024
By Health Shield's Wellbeing Team

Vitamins are essential nutrients required by the body for optimal growth, maintenance, and overall health. They are a vital part of how we function and our physiological makeup. Without these vitamins our bodies and minds would fail to function.

Vitamins play a crucial role in a variety of functions, including metabolism, the immune system, vision, skin health, and nerve function. So here are some practical tips to ensure that you get enough vitamins in your diet.

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin called retinol that plays a crucial role in vision, skin health, and immune function. Fat-soluble vitamins cannot be digested and used without some fats in the diet. Vitamin A is found in foods like oily fish, eggs, cheese, milk, yogurt and liver. Our bodies can also convert beta carotene into retinol. We can get beta carotene from yellow, red, orange and green vegetables, and fruits like mangoes, apricots and papaya.

Without enough vitamin A our bodies' natural defences will slip and we might get ill more often, making it an essential vitamin for all of us. We also wouldn't be able to see in the dark very well, so vitamin A really helps anyone driving on the roads during darkness. Like with all vitamins, you'll need to strike a healthy balance - as you can get too much of a good thing. High levels of vitamin A can be harmful during pregnancy, so pregnant women should avoid taking vitamin A supplements and speak to their doctor or midwife for dietary advice.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C is a water-soluble vitamin that acts as an antioxidant in the body. It plays a key role in maintaining a strong immune system, healing wounds, and helping to generate collagen that keeps joints and skin healthy - as well as boosting your response to stress. The best sources of vitamin C can be found in fruits and vegetables that are purple, red, and green in colour. Try to aim for at least five to seven portions of fruit and veg every day and get as wide of a variety as you can.

The most common signs of a vitamin C deficiency are feeling lethargic, bleeding gums, bruising easily and wounds and ulcers that aren't healing as quickly as they should. Studies have shown that in the UK cases of scurvy are on the rise - which is a clinical deficiency of vitamin C. The condition was scourge of sailors between the years 1500 and 1800. It was not until Dr James Lind's important treatment on HMS Salisbury by issuing lemons and limes to the infected crew, that a cure was found.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is another fat-soluble vitamin that helps the body absorb calcium and phosphorus, which are essential for bones, teeth and muscle function, but unfortunately, many of us in the UK are not getting enough. Vitamin D is found in oily fish, eggs, red meat, mushrooms, and fortified foods. Our bodies can also produce vitamin D alone if we get enough sunlight. During the winter months in the UK this can be difficult, and it's why the NHS recommends everyone takes a vitamin D supplement of 10 micrograms per day. From April to September we should all be able to get enough sunlight to achieve healthy levels of vitamin D, so supplements aren't necessary during these months.

More research is emerging which suggests vitamin D also plays a crucial role in helping us maintain good mental health and energy levels, making it a key ingredient for a healthy working day.

Vitamin E

Vitamin E is a fat-soluble vitamin that acts as an antioxidant which together with vitamins A and C builds a strong immune system and helps with healthy ageing, with research suggesting it can have a protective effect against heart disease, cancers and eye problems. The best sources of vitamin E in the diet are vegetable oils like rapeseed, seed oils, olive oil, nuts and seeds, as well as wheatgerm found in cereals and some bread.

Vitamin K

Vitamin K is a fat-soluble vitamin that is important for blood clotting and bone health. As we age, our bone density starts to decrease, which means we're more susceptible to injuries making it important to recognise the need to support healthy bones. Leafy greens - such as kale and spinach - soybeans, and meal replacement supplements are a great way to get more of the good stuff your body needs. Eating a healthy, balanced diet usually provides enough vitamin K. Although vitamin K deficiency is rare, studies have shown that women who are going through or have been through menopause may be at higher risk of osteoporosis and fractures. This means vitamin K, together with vitamin D can be beneficial for menopausal women.

B Vitamins

B vitamins are a group of water-soluble vitamins that play a crucial role in many processes across the body like healthy nerve function, but they're particularly important for how well we feel day to day, as B vitamins play a role in our energy levels and mental health. We need B vitamins to use the energy from the foods we eat so we can be active and think clearly. They also help produce brain chemicals which help to regulate our mood and low levels are linked to depression, anxiety, irritability, low mood and insomnia.

Because there are several B vitamins we can get them from a variety of sources. Many can be found in wholegrain carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables, but vitamin B12 (essential for

red blood cells, a healthy nervous system and energy levels) is only found in good amounts in animal foods such as meat, fish, eggs and dairy. Eating a balanced diet with a variety of whole, real foods and aiming to avoid too many processed foods is the best way to go. We should all aim to eat a variety of foods as it's the best way to ensure that we get all the essential vitamins our body needs. Try to include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats in your diet.

The Eatwell Guide is recommended by the NHS and gives a simple overview of how to do this.

[VIEW THE NHS EATWELL GUIDE](#)

It's always healthier to get these vitamins by eating the right foods if you can, but if for whatever reason you find it hard to eat the variety of foods needed you should consider talking to your doctor to see if supplements are a good way to support you.

Lastly, get out there and enjoy more of the sun when you can as this is a great (and easy) source of Vitamin D.

Make the most of your *my*wellness benefits

Don't miss out on the range of wellbeing services included in your health cash plan - access them easily online to support your health.

[Discover your benefits](#)

Health Shield Friendly Society Limited
Electra Way
Crewe Business Park
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6HS

Tel: 01270 588555

Got a question about your cash plan?
[Check out our FAQs](#)