



Eat Well, Live Well

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Dietitians of Canada
Les diététistes du Canada

Step Right Up

to Healthy Eating

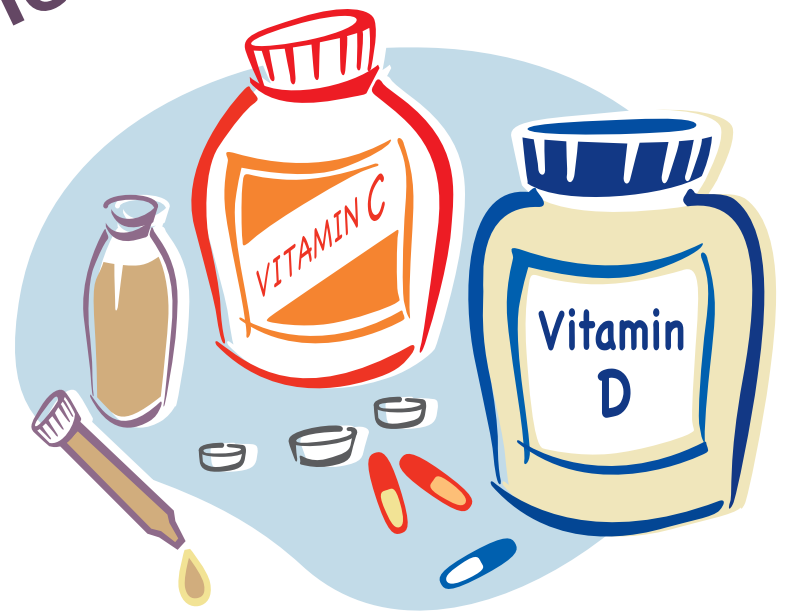
Do I Need a Vitamin or Mineral Supplement?

Most healthy adults can satisfy their vitamin and mineral needs by eating well with *Canada's Food Guide* – but there are important exceptions.

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide now recommends specific supplements for women who may become pregnant, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and adults over the age of fifty. Further, people who smoke, and people with restricted diets may need more of certain nutrients than what they might get from healthy food choices. There are also certain medical reasons to use or limit the use of particular vitamin and mineral supplements. Your physician and registered dietitian can help advise you of your specific vitamin and mineral requirements, as getting too much of certain nutrients is as much of a concern as getting too little.

Women of childbearing age

All women who could become pregnant should take a multivitamin containing 400 µg (0.4 mg) of folic acid every day to help prevent having a baby with a neural tube defect. This is a birth defect that affects the baby's brain, skull or spine. Folic acid needs are also increased for pregnant and breastfeeding women and these women should also take a multivitamin containing folic acid every day. Pregnant women need to ensure that their multivitamin contains sufficient iron as needs increase by 50%. A health care professional can help in the selection of the appropriate multivitamin.



Men and women over the age of 50

Vitamin D is known as the “sunshine vitamin” yet Canadians cannot make enough of this nutrient during winter or, any time of year if sun exposure is limited. The need for vitamin D increases after the age of 50. Naturally occurring food sources of vitamin D are mainly limited to fish such as fresh salmon and canned salmon, tuna and sardines. Fortified food sources of vitamin D include cow's milk, fortified plant beverages (e.g. soy), and margarine. In addition to following *Canada's Food Guide*, everyone over the age of 50 should take a daily vitamin D supplement of 10 µg (400 IU).

People over 50 years of age may not be able to absorb the vitamin B12 that occurs naturally in foods such as milk, meat and eggs. Vitamin B12 is necessary for making red blood cells and ensuring normal nerve function. A daily supplement providing at least 2.4 µg of vitamin B12 is recommended for adults over 50. Men and postmenopausal women should choose a vitamin and mineral supplement that does **not** contain any or much iron.

Promoting Health Through Food and Nutrition

www.dietitians.ca/eatwell



Do I Need a Vitamin or Mineral Supplement?

People who don't drink milk

Cow's milk is a key source of calcium, vitamin D and other bone-building nutrients. People who drink less than 500 mL (2 cups) of milk or fortified plant beverage (e.g. soy) daily need a vitamin D supplement. Foods such as yogurt may provide a small amount of vitamin D when made with vitamin D fortified milk. In addition, calcium and other bone-building nutrients may also be lacking if milk or alternatives are not consumed. A supplement in this case may be recommended.

People who smoke

Smoking increases the need for vitamin C. People of any age who smoke should take a supplement containing vitamin C, as well as including food sources such as oranges, grapefruit and potatoes.

Vegetarians

A well planned balanced vegetarian diet (lacto, lacto-ovo, vegan) can meet most nutritional needs. Vegans who exclude all animal products from their food choices require a source of vitamin B12 either from foods fortified with vitamin B12 or a supplement. Young women who are vegetarian may need to take an iron supplement.



To Meet Nutrient Needs - Follow *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*

For most people, eating the types and amounts of food recommended by the food guide for your age and sex provides you with the vitamins and minerals your body needs.

You need over 50 different nutrients for good health.

Eating a variety of foods is the best way to get the variety of nutrients that you need for health.

Vitamin and mineral supplements do not provide important nutrients such as fibre, carbohydrates, protein and essential fats.

Satisfy your need for these nutrients by eating vegetables, fruit, whole grains, milk, cheese, yogurt, meat, fish, eggs, beans, nuts and seeds as well as canola, olive, and soybean oils.

Phytochemicals are natural plant chemicals found in vegetables, fruit, whole grains, nuts and seeds.

Many of these substances have been shown to be good for your health. Research also shows that these phytochemicals are more effective when eaten as foods, rather than as supplements.



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Vitamin and Mineral Supplement Tips

Restricted calorie diets may leave you short on some essential nutrients.

If you are on a very low calorie diet, you should get the advice of a registered dietitian and check with your physician. A multivitamin supplement may be recommended.

You don't get energy from eating vitamin pills.

You **do** get energy as calories from carbohydrates, fats and proteins in the food you eat. Vitamins in food help convert energy from these food components into a type of energy your body can use but they do not supply energy by themselves. Why not try a daily walk to energize yourself while strengthening your heart, lungs and muscles?

If you are "stressed out", pay close attention to what you eat.

Eating well can help you cope with the stresses of daily living – over eating or under eating are not solutions. A supplement will only provide some missing nutrients if you are not eating well.

You may require vitamin or mineral supplements for medical conditions such as anemia or osteoporosis or during times of physical stress, such as after an operation or during a severe infection. It's important to follow the advice of your physician and registered dietitian.

Dietitians provide food and nutrition information you can trust. Find a dietitian in your area at www.dietitians.ca/find or call 1-888-901-7776.



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Taking large amounts of vitamins or minerals can be dangerous.

Vitamin A, vitamin D, niacin, calcium, iron, and selenium are particularly toxic in high doses. Large amounts of vitamin B6 and fluoride also have harmful side effects. Taking more than 2000 mg of vitamin C, for example, may cause diarrhea and gastrointestinal problems, and is not recommended.

Talk to your physician or registered dietitian

about your particular needs and eating pattern before taking any supplements. If you are unsure about any vitamin or mineral supplement you are interested in buying speak to the pharmacist. Keep supplements, especially those containing iron, away from children.

Helpful Links

- Learn more about *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* at www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
- Find out how your food choices measure up at www.dietitians.ca/eattracker

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