

Essential Vitamins for Men's Health: Vitamin D

"It's hard to get enough vitamin D from food," advises Campbell. "Many men who work inside all day do not get enough exposure to the sun, which is needed for the body to manufacture vitamin D. Most men can benefit from taking 1,000 IU [international units] of vitamin D daily."

What you need to know about vitamin D:

Vitamin D becomes even more important with age, because it's needed to absorb calcium and helps prevent weak muscles and bones.

Recent research also suggests that vitamin D deficiency may increase the risk for colon cancer, and one study found that men with low levels of vitamin D were twice as likely to have a heart attack as men with normal levels.

On the other hand, too much vitamin D can cause fatigue and muscle weakness, so you should stay below 2,000 IU unless your doctor advises otherwise.

"Good nutrition sources for vitamin D include salmon, sardines, cod liver oil, milk, cheese, egg yolk, orange juice, yogurt, and fortified breakfast cereal," says Kari L. Kooi, MS, RD, a clinical dietitian specialist at the Methodist Hospital in Houston, Tex.

Folate for Heart Health

Folate, or folic acid, is one of the important B vitamins. Folate may help protect men and women from heart disease because it prevents the build-up of homocysteine, a substance that your body needs to build protein but that can lead to heart and blood vessel disease if produced in excess.

What you need to know about folate:

The recommended allowance for folate is 400 micrograms (mcg) a day, which you can get from eating a few servings of leafy green vegetables or beans daily.

Folate can be included in your multivitamin, but you should not have to take extra dietary supplements unless your doctor says your homocysteine is low. Too much folate may increase your risk for colon cancer.

"Great sources of nutrition for folate include lima beans, spinach, asparagus, oranges, strawberries, and avocado," says Kooi.

Vitamin B12 for a Healthy Nervous System

Older men, in particular, may have an increased need for this B vitamin, which boosts brain health. "Vitamin B12 supports the normal functioning of the nervous system, including memory," says Kooi. "Depression and dementia are symptoms of a low serum B12."

What you need to know about vitamin B12:

The recommended daily allowance for B12 is 2.4 mcg, which you can easily get from your diet. One serving of fortified breakfast cereal will provide all that you need.

B12 may be included in your daily multivitamin. Although high doses have not been shown to be harmful, you should not need to supplement this vitamin unless your doctor recommends it.

"Great food sources for B12 include salmon, shrimp, beef, chicken, clams, eggs, milk, and cheese," says Kooi.

Vitamin A for Vision and a Good Immune System

"Vitamin A is important for maintaining good vision," Kooi says. "It is also known as the anti-infective vitamin because of its role in supporting activities of the immune system."



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What you need to know about vitamin A:

The recommended daily intake of vitamin A is 3,000 IU. Too much vitamin A can cause nausea and vomiting and result in weak bones.

Vitamin A deficiency is rare in the United States—you should get plenty as long as you eat your fruits and vegetables. It may be in your multivitamin, but you should not need any additional supplements.

"The best nutrition sources for vitamin A are carrots, spinach, sweet potatoes, apricots, cantaloupe, broccoli, eggs, milk, and cod liver oil," says Kooi.

Vitamin C for Healthy Aging

"Vitamin C is a potent antioxidant that serves a protective role in the body by neutralizing free radicals that want to attack healthy cells," explains Kooi. "High intake of vitamin-C foods can help slow signs of aging." Although it is no longer believed that vitamin C can keep you from catching a cold, it is an essential building block for good nutrition.

What you need to know about vitamin C:

Not enough vitamin C can result in anemia and scurvy. Scurvy is still seen in some malnourished older adults.

The recommended daily amount of vitamin C for men is 90 milligrams (mg) a day.

Too much vitamin C will not hurt you, because your body can't store it, but it can give you an upset stomach. Taking a multivitamin and eating your fruits and vegetables is all you need to do to be sure you get enough of this nutrient.

"Great sources of vitamin C include oranges, bell pepper, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, potatoes, strawberries, tomatoes, kiwi, lemons, limes, cantaloupe, watermelon, pineapple, and asparagus," says Kooi.

Some medical conditions may require special dietary supplements, so talk to your doctor about your specific nutrition needs. For most men, the bottom line on vitamins and men's health is this: If you eat a well-balanced diet, take a standard multivitamin, and supplement with 1,000 IU of vitamin D every day, your nutrition needs should be covered.