



Vitamin and Mineral Supplements for Adults

What are the best sources of vitamins and minerals?

Food is the best source of vitamins and minerals and different foods have different combinations of those nutrients. For example, milk has protein, calcium, riboflavin and vitamins A, B2, B12 and D. Oranges contain vitamin C, folate, potassium and fibre.

Eating a variety of whole, unprocessed foods will help you meet your nutritional needs. *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* is an example of a healthy eating pattern. For more information, visit www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide.

Most people get enough vitamins and minerals from food alone when they follow a healthy diet. However, some people may need extra vitamins and minerals from a supplement. Talk to your health care provider about the best supplement to meet your needs.

When do I need a supplement?

You might need a vitamin and/or mineral supplement 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. Folate helps the brain and spine, also called the neural tube, to develop. Getting enough folate before and during the first 3 months of pregnancy helps your baby develop a healthy 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/mineral supplement with 0.4 milligrams (400 micrograms) of folic acid every day. Make sure your supplement contains vitamin B12. Also continue to eat foods that have folate such as:

- dried legumes like beans, chickpeas, and lentils;

- dark green leafy vegetables like spinach; and
- grain products with added folic acid like enriched pastas and cereals.

Pregnant women need extra iron to support the growth and normal brain development of their baby. Taking 16 to 20 milligrams of iron per day from a supplement is recommended, as well as eating foods high in iron. Some women may need more iron than others. Talk to your health care provider to find out how much iron is right for you. Food sources of iron include:

- meat and poultry;
- shellfish and fish;
- lentils and dried beans;
- iron enriched cereals; and
- vegetables like spinach, swiss chard, green peas, asparagus and beet greens.

Adults over 50 Years of Age

Adults over 50 should take a daily supplement with 400 IU (international units) of vitamin D, as well as vitamin D from food. Foods that have vitamin D include:

- milk or powdered milk;
- soy beverages fortified with vitamin D; and
- oily fish such as salmon and sardines.

Adults over 50 should also 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, almond and rice beverages, and 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 probably isn't fortified.

Special Dietary Considerations

Some people need supplements because they are not able to meet their nutrient needs because of certain food choices.

Vegans (vegetarians who do not eat any animal products) need vitamin B12 fortified foods or a supplement. Iron, zinc, calcium, and 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 also need more calcium and vitamin D. Talk with your health care provider about a supplement if you have osteoporosis.

People with poor appetites, food allergies or intolerances, illness or injuries should talk to a dietitian about their nutritional needs. A multivitamin/mineral supplement may help.

What kind of supplement is best?

Multivitamin/mineral supplements have close to the daily recommended amounts for adults, except calcium, and are a safe choice for most people. When choosing a multivitamin/mineral supplement, choose one for your age group and sex.

Do I need large amounts of vitamins and minerals beyond a multivitamin/mineral supplement?

Not usually. 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.

You can get the vitamins and minerals you need from food by following Canada's Food Guide and, if desired, taking a multivitamin/mineral.

Are large amounts of vitamins and minerals ever needed?

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. However, only use large amounts if advised by your health care provider. Too much of some nutrients, including iron, can be harmful.

Talk to your health care provider or registered dietitian if you have any concerns about vitamins or minerals.

What should I look for when choosing supplements?

When you buy a vitamin and mineral supplement, look for a Drug Identification Number (DIN) or Natural Product Number (NPN). A DIN or NPN means that the supplement meets Health Canada's safety standards. 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 #38c Pregnancy and Nutrition: Folate and Neural Tube Defects](#)
- [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.