

# Functions and Food Sources of Some Common Vitamins

## Information about Some Common Vitamins

Vitamins don't give you calories or energy but do help you stay healthy. You cannot make vitamins so you must get them from the foods you eat. Vitamins are only needed in small amounts and most people can meet their vitamin needs by following "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide" (CFG) and eating a variety of healthy foods. Some people may need extra vitamins to help them meet their special needs.

There are two types of vitamins: water soluble and fat soluble. Water soluble vitamins include vitamins B1, B2, B3, B6, B12, vitamin C, biotin and folate. They are not stored in large amounts in the body, and any extra is lost through your urine. Fat soluble vitamins include vitamins A, D, E and K and they can be stored in your body. High amounts of fat soluble vitamins are not recommended, as these can cause health problems. and lists the best food sources of these vitamins

## Steps You Can Take

The following table will help you to understand why it is important to get enough of some of the common vitamins and lists the best food sources of these vitamins.

| Vitamin                    | Function  | Food Sources   |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Vitamin B1<br>(Thiamin)    | Helps with energy production in your body.  | Whole grains, enriched grains<br>Liver, pork, dried beans, nuts and seeds  |
| Vitamin B2<br>(Riboflavin) | Helps with energy production in your body.<br>Helps your body use other B vitamins. | Soybeans, meat and poultry, liver and eggs<br>Mushrooms<br>Milk, cheese, yogurt<br>Whole grains, enriched grains |



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| <p>Vitamin B3<br/>(Niacin)</p>                       | <p>Helps your body to use protein, fat and carbohydrate to make energy.</p> <p>Helps enzymes work properly in your body.</p>   | <p>Mushrooms</p> <p>Peanut butter, meat, fish, poultry</p> <p>Whole grains, enriched grains</p>  |
| <p>Biotin</p>  | <p>Allows your body to use protein, fat and carbohydrate from food.</p>  | <p>Sweet potatoes</p> <p>Nonfat milk, yogurt</p> <p>Peanuts, almonds, eggs, liver, soy protein</p> <p>*The biotin content in food can vary greatly</p>   |
| <p>Vitamin B6<br/>(Pyridoxin)</p>                    | <p>Helps your body to make and use protein and glycogen which is the stored energy in your muscles and liver.</p> <p>Helps form hemoglobin which carries oxygen in your blood.</p>                                   | <p>Potatoes, bananas</p> <p>100% bran, instant oatmeal</p> <p>Meat, fish, poultry, liver, soybeans, chickpeas, lentils, pistachio, nuts, sunflower seeds</p>   |
| <p>Vitamin B12<br/>(Cobalamin)</p>                   | <p>Works with the vitamin folate to make DNA.</p> <p>Helps to make healthy blood cells. Low levels of vitamin B12 can cause a type of anemia.</p> <p>Keeps nerves working properly.</p>                              | <p>Milk, cheese, yogurt, fortified soy or rice beverages</p> <p>Meat, fish, poultry, liver, eggs, fortified soy products</p>   |
| <p>Folate (also known as folacin and folic acid)</p> | <p>Helps to produce and maintain DNA and cells.</p> <p>Helps to make red blood cells and prevent anemia.</p> <p>Getting enough folic acid lowers the risk of having a baby with birth defects like spina bifida.</p> | <p>Asparagus, cooked spinach, romaine lettuce, Brussels sprouts, beets, broccoli, corn, green peas, oranges, orange juice</p> <p>Bread, enriched pasta, wheat germ</p> <p>Liver, dried beans, soybeans, chickpeas, lentils, sunflower seeds, flaxseeds</p> <p><i>*Folic acid is the type of folate found in Vitamin supplements and fortified foods.</i></p> |
| <p>Vitamin C</p>                                     | <p>May help prevent cell damage and reduce risk for certain cancers, heart disease and other diseases.</p>   | <p>Citrus fruits such as oranges, grapefruits and their juices, kiwi, strawberries, mangoes, papaya</p>  |



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|  | <p>Helps heal cuts and wounds and keeps gums healthy. Protects you from infections by keeping your immune system healthy.</p> <p>Increases the amount of iron your body absorbs from some foods.</p>   | <p>Red, yellow and green peppers, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, tomatoes, raw dark leafy vegetables</p>  |
| Vitamin A  | <p>Helps you to see in the day and at night.</p> <p>Protects you from infections by keeping skin and other body parts healthy.</p> <p>Promotes normal growth and development.</p>  | <p>Liver, some fish</p> <p>Milk, cheese</p>  |
| Carotenoids:<br>alpha, betacarotene<br>and betacryptoxanthin | <p>Carotenoids are not vitamins but some types can turn into vitamin A in the body.</p> <p>Act as antioxidants which protect your body from damage caused by harmful molecules called free radicals.</p>   | <p>Cantaloupe, pink grapefruit, tomatoes, broccoli, dark green leafy vegetables like spinach, beet greens and Swiss chard, dark orange vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes</p> |
| Vitamin D  | <p>Increases the amount of calcium and phosphorus your body absorbs from foods.</p> <p>Deposits calcium and phosphorus in bones and teeth, making them stronger and healthier.</p> <p>Protects against infections by keeping your immune system healthy.</p> | <p>Milk, fortified soy and rice beverages</p> <p>Fortified margarine</p> <p>Some fish, eggs, organ meats, fish liver oils</p>  |
| Vitamin E  | <p>Helps to maintain a healthy immune system and other body processes.</p> <p>Acts as an antioxidant and protects cells from damage.</p>   | <p>Vegetable oils</p> <p>Avocados, leafy green vegetables</p> <p>Wheat germ, sunflower seeds, some nuts, peanut butter</p>   |
| Vitamin K  | <p>Makes proteins that cause our blood to clot, when you are bleeding.</p> <p>Involved in making body proteins for your blood, bones and kidneys.</p>  | <p>Broccoli, soybeans, dark green leafy vegetables such as kale, collards, turnip/beet greens and spinach</p>  |





## Steps for Special Consideration

Most people can get enough vitamins by following CFG. However at certain life stages and in certain situations vitamins need special attention. In some cases supplements may be needed. These include:

- Vitamin D: If you are over 50, you have higher needs for vitamin D - an amount that may be difficult to meet with food alone. Health Canada recommends that men and women over the age of 50 take a daily supplement of 400 IU.
- Folate: All women who could become pregnant, are pregnant, or breastfeeding should take a daily multivitamin containing 400 mcg (0.4 mg) of folic acid to help prevent birth defects.
- Vitamin C: If you smoke you need an extra 35 mg of vitamin C each day. You can easily get this amount by eating a variety of fruits and vegetables and getting the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables from CFG.
- Vitamin K: People who use Warfarin (Coumadin) need to make sure they eat the same amounts of vitamin K foods each day. A sudden increase or drop in vitamin K foods can affect how this medication works.

## Additional Resources

Health Canada, Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide- [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide)

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