

Do I need a vitamin or mineral 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 provides you with the vitamins and minerals your body needs.

For some people, specific supplements are recommended to meet nutrient needs.

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 neural tube defects. This is a birth defect that affects the baby’s brain, skull or spine. If neural tube defects occur, they happen during the first month of pregnancy. That’s why it’s important to take folic acid supplements *before* you get pregnant.

Folic acid needs are also increased for pregnant and breastfeeding women and these women should also take a multivitamin containing folic acid every day.

Iron needs also increase during pregnancy and so your prenatal vitamin should provide 16 to 20 mg of iron.

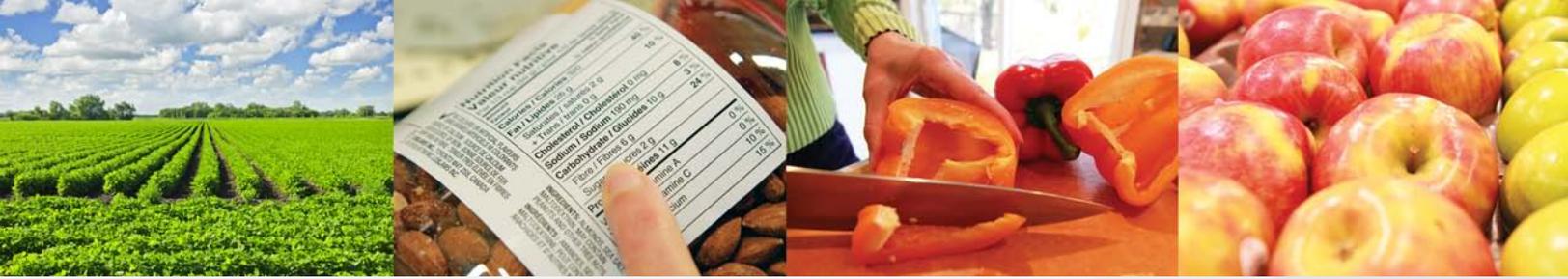
Men and women over the age of 50

Vitamin D is known as the “sunshine vitamin” yet Canadians can’t 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. Vitamin D is important for bone strength.

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).

Vitamin B12 may not be absorbed by people over 50 years of age. Vitamin B12 is necessary for making red blood cells and ensuring normal nerve function. Eating foods fortified with vitamin B12 or taking a daily supplement providing at least 2.4 µg of vitamin B12 is recommended for adults over 50.

Postmenopausal women should choose a vitamin and mineral supplement that does **not** contain any or much iron, for example a supplement made for seniors. A high iron intake, from iron supplements for example, may be associated with iron overload.



Vegetarians

A healthy vegetarian diet can meet most nutritional needs. However, because vegetarians rely on plant sources of iron, their iron needs are higher. Supplements to meet iron needs may be required.

Vegans who exclude all animal products require a source of vitamin B12 either from foods fortified with vitamin B12, nutritional yeast, or a supplement.

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.

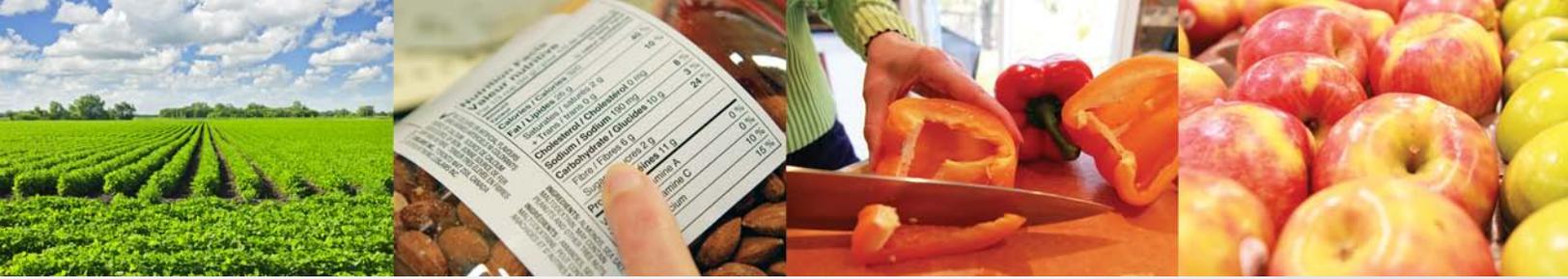
You need over 50 different nutrients for good health.

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

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 your physician. A multivitamin supplement may be recommended.

If you are considering a supplement, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- 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.
- Food contains other important nutrients that vitamins and mineral supplements don't provide, such as fibre, carbohydrate, protein and essential fats. It is important to eat nutrient-rich foods such as vegetables, fruit, whole grains, milk, cheese, yogurt, meat, fish, eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds, even if you take a supplement.



- **Taking large amounts of vitamin or mineral supplements 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 3000 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.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php
- Find out how your food choices measure up at www.dietitians.ca/eatracker
- Learn more about food sources of nutrients at www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Nutrition-A-Z.aspx



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