

Vitamins and Minerals for Older Adults

What are vitamins and minerals? - Vitamins & Minerals are nutrients that your body needs to survive and stay healthy. They help your body grow and function properly. There are 13 essential vitamins – A, C, D, E, K, and the B vitamins (thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, biotin, B6, B12, and folate). There are also a variety of minerals that are essential for health. Some, like iodine & fluoride, are needed in small quantities. Others, such as calcium, magnesium, and potassium, are needed in larger amounts.

How can I get enough vitamins & minerals? – If you eat a varied diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, and dairy or dairy alternatives, you can get most vitamins and minerals you need from food. It is best to get vitamins & minerals from food, rather than a pill, because nutrient-dense foods contain other things that are good for you, like fiber.

Should I take a vitamin/mineral supplement? – Most older people can get all the nutrients they need from food. However, if you feel your diet lacks variety, you are not eating enough because your appetite has changed, you are not feeling well, or maybe you can't afford the foods you need to eat healthy, then talk with your doctor to find out if you are missing any important vitamins or minerals in your diet. Your doctor may recommend a dietary supplement.

What should I look for in a supplement? – If you do need a dietary supplement, look for one that contains the vitamin or mineral that you need, without a lot of unnecessary ingredients. Avoid paying for supplements you do not need. Read labels and avoid mega doses. Too much of some vitamins and minerals can be harmful. Your doctor or pharmacist can recommend brands that fit your needs.

Meals on Wheels – A hot, nutritious meal is the basis of the Meals on Wheels Program. Each of our meals meet at least 1/3 of the Daily Recommended Dietary Allowance for the population we serve. Along with a variety of other nutrients, our meals also provide a good source of Vitamin A at least 3 x's week; a good Vitamin C source served daily; and a carton of 1% milk, fortified with Vitamin A & D, served alongside the hot meals.

Key Vitamins & Minerals for People Over Age 51:

- **Calcium** – Important for strong bones & teeth; older folks are at risk for bone loss. Get calcium from milk & dairy foods, dark leafy greens, soybeans, canned sardines, salmon with bones, calcium-fortified foods.
- **Potassium** – Helps to keep our heart, nerves, and muscles healthy. Foods that are high in potassium include dried apricots, lentils, potatoes, avocado, beans, bananas, and a variety of other foods.
- **Sodium** – Adults 51 and older should reduce their sodium intake. Do so by preparing your own meals, limiting processed foods, using less salt when cooking, and avoid using salt at the table.
- **Vitamin D** – Important for healthy bone structure, find Vit. D in fortified milk/milk alternatives, fatty fish like salmon & tuna, & fortified cereal. And don't forget, our bodies can make Vit. D with a little sunshine.
- **Vitamin B12** – Some people over 50 have trouble absorbing Vit B12. Check with your doctor if you need a B12 supplement. Meat, fish, poultry, milk, and fortified breakfast cereals are good sources.
- **Vitamin A** – Important for eye health, carrots, cantaloupe, sweet potato, pumpkin, and eggs are great food sources of Vitamin A.
- **Vitamin C** – Aids in wound healing and preventing infections. Fruits & vegetables are among the best sources of Vitamin C.

Source: *Vitamins and Minerals for Older Adults*. NIH National Institute on Aging (NIA). January 1, 2021; www.nia.nih.gov

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