

Vitamin B12: Mental and Emotional Vitality

Why is vitamin B12 important for health?

- Vitamin B12 is required for proper nerve function, including the nerve cells in the brain needed for memory.
- Vitamin B12 helps another B vitamin, folate, in its role in making new cells.
- Vitamin B12, folate and vitamin B6 help maintain normal levels of homocysteine. Large amounts of homocysteine may increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease and diseases that result in a loss of mental function.

Should I take a vitamin B12 supplement?

- Check with your doctor before taking a supplement. Follow the label about when to take it and how many tablets to take at a time.
- Eating foods fortified with vitamin B12 or taking a vitamin B12 supplement is recommended for pregnant women, vegetarians and older adults. Older adults who can not absorb natural vitamin B12 well (because of reduced stomach acidity) are able to absorb it from fortified foods and supplements.
- Choose a generic supplement brand because it will cost less.

Why should I be concerned about vitamin B12 as I get older?

- The level of acid in the stomach decreases with age. Low levels of stomach acid result in less absorption of food-bound vitamin B12.
- Adults older than age 50 years are advised to meet their need for this vitamin mainly by consuming foods fortified with vitamin B12 or a B12 supplement.

What foods contain vitamin B12?

- Vitamin B12 is found in animal products.
- Good sources of vitamin B12 include meat, fish, poultry, eggs and dairy products.



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How much vitamin B12 do I need?

2.4 micrograms is recommended for adults of all ages, which can be obtained by following dietary recommendations from MyPyramid, in particular for animal products:

- Consume 2-3 dairy servings each day. A serving of dairy includes 1 cup of milk or yogurt, 1 1/2 ounces of natural cheese or 2 ounces processed cheese.
- Consume 2-3 servings of meat, poultry, eggs or fish each day. A serving includes 2-3 ounces of lean cooked meat, poultry or fish, or two eggs.

If I don't eat animal products, will I get enough vitamin B12?

People who do not eat animal products will be able to obtain their daily dose of vitamin B12 only if they take a vitamin B12 supplement or if they eat a vitamin B12-fortified cereal product. Check the labels of foods to see if they contain vitamin B12. Also, ask your doctor.



What other ways can I get more vitamin B12?

Some people get monthly vitamin B12 shots to treat a diagnosed vitamin B12 deficiency.