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## Healthy Insights

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### Vitamins and Minerals

Every day, doctors, television commercials, and magazine articles remind us to take our vitamins, minerals, and dietary supplements. However, you may not know what vitamins and minerals do, how they can help you, and which you may need.

#### What Are Vitamins and Minerals?

Vitamins and minerals are nutrients that come naturally from the foods you eat. These nutrients help keep your body functioning well. If you are eating a healthy, balanced diet, it may not be necessary to supplement your diet by taking vitamins and minerals as a pill, capsule, or liquid. We need vitamins and minerals to keep our bodies running well. When you don't supply your body with the nutrients it needs, you may feel run down or be more susceptible to illness.

#### Finding Nutrients in Food

It is better to get nutrients from the food that you eat rather than from supplements. However, you may be unable to eat the specific foods that will give you the nutrients you're lacking. Maybe you're having dental problems and cannot chew hard foods. You could be allergic to a nutrient-rich food. If anything prevents you from getting adequate nutrition from your diet, it is important for you to research which



supplement you might need. Keep in mind that your needs might change depending on your age, any medical conditions you may have, and any medications you may be taking. Here is a rundown of most important nutrients for maintaining health, and information on which foods are the best sources.

#### Calcium

Calcium promotes bone strength and prevents bone fractures. When you think of calcium, you probably think of milk. In addition to milk, there are plenty of other foods that provide your body with calcium. These include canned fish and dark-green leafy vegetables.

#### Vitamin B12

This vitamin helps keep red blood cells and nerves healthy. Vitamin B12 also helps make DNA (your cell's genetic material) and nerve cells. Foods that have Vitamin B12 include fish, poultry, and red meat.

## Vitamin B3

Vitamin B3 helps you maintain a healthy cholesterol level and may relieve arthritis. It also increases brain function, making it easier to think clearly. Some foods that will add vitamin B3 into your diet are nuts, legumes, and brown rice.

## Vitamin B6

Vitamin B6's job is to create red blood cells which carry oxygen to all parts of your body. Without this vitamin, you might start to feel tired and weak. To keep that from happening, include starchy vegetables and bananas in your diet.

## Magnesium

Magnesium is an important mineral that maintains muscle and nerve function, blood sugar levels, and blood pressure. It keeps many of the body's major systems in check, so including the proper amount of magnesium in your diet is essential. You can eat green leafy vegetables, whole grains, and nuts to add more magnesium into your diet.

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps your body hold on to minerals like phosphorus and calcium. It keeps your bones strong and supports your muscles. One way that you could increase your vitamin D levels is to get outside and expose yourself to sunlight. Some foods that you could eat are tuna, salmon, egg yolk, and milk.

## Herbal Supplements

Many people are comfortable taking herbal supplements because they are labeled as being "all natural." Keep in mind that herbal supplements, although they may be labeled "all natural," can have side effects and may even interact with your prescription medications. Also, because herbal

supplements are not regulated as drugs by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA), they have not undergone clinical testing to study their effectiveness in improving your health. Lack of FDA oversight means that there are no laws requiring them to meet dosing and quality standards.

## Talk With Your Doctor

Like herbal supplements, vitamins and minerals are not tested or regulated by the FDA. Your only guarantee that they contain what the label claims is the trustworthiness of the manufacturer, so select products made and sold by legitimate companies. It is also important to note that some vitamins and supplements could cause negative side effects, especially if taken in megadoses. Before starting a new supplement, be sure to notify your doctor and discuss its potential side effects. Ask about the dosage of vitamins or minerals that you need each day and take only the amount recommended for your age and sex.

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## Sources

### Dietary Supplements for Older Adults

<http://bit.ly/3OGijby>

### Vitamins and Minerals for Older Adults

<http://bit.ly/3EKfhhR>

### FDA 101: Dietary Supplements

<http://bit.ly/3EO0wdQ>

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*IPRO Healthy Insights* is authored by Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO's Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, a nationally recognized public health advocate.

IPRO is a non-profit organization that works with government agencies, providers and patients to measure and improve healthcare for all. For over 35 years we've made creative use of clinical expertise, emerging technology and data solutions to make the healthcare system work better.



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