

# Nutrition News

## Information for Senior Citizens

Developed by Colorado State University Extension  
Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition

### Vitamin Supplements - Is “More” Always Better?

When Louise was born, she seemed to be a normal baby. However, one month after she was born, she began to lose weight and became listless. After a trip to the doctor, it was discovered that her left kidney had stopped functioning. What had caused this problem? Her mother revealed that she had taken 25,000 units of Vitamin A (the Recommended Dietary Allowance is 5,000 units) during her pregnancy. Louise had almost died due to an overdose of Vitamin A.

Many of us have grown up with the idea that more is better. This does not apply to vitamins. The story about Louise is just one illustration of what harm excess amounts of vitamins can do.

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### Current Trends

One of the major health trends is the use of vitamin (and mineral) supplements. Every year, people spend billions of dollars on supplements. Books, magazines, health food stores, and companies that manufacture the supplements are driving this growing market.

Vitamins are essential nutrients, meaning we need to consume an adequate amount of vitamins from a well balanced diet. However, we only require a certain amount of vitamins. Too little or too much of a particular vitamin can be harmful to our health.

Before you go to your nearest grocery store or health food store to buy supplements, it is important that you are aware of all the facts. Remember, knowledge is your greatest weapon against misinformation.



**“Even nectar is a poison if taken in excess.”**

*-Old Proverb*

## Myth vs. Fact

**Myth :** “The more vitamin supplements I take, the better.”

**Fact:** Vitamins, especially Vitamins A and D, can build up and become toxic in the body when taken in excess.

**Myth:** “Vitamins can give me more energy.”

**Fact:** Unfortunately, vitamins do not give us more energy. Only nutrients like protein, fat and carbohydrate can provide energy.

**Myth:** “I can’t get enough vitamins from the food I eat.”

**Fact:** Anyone who eats a diet that includes grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, beans, and meats should normally not have to worry about taking a supplement. There are special cases in which people may need a supplement. You might need a supplement if:

- you take certain medications.
- you don’t eat foods from every food group (e.g. dairy products).
- you have a chronic disease such as kidney disease.
- you are strict vegetarian.
- you eat too little food.

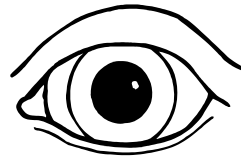
If you fit in one of these categories, you should talk to your doctor about the possibility of vitamin supplementation.

If you decide that a vitamin supplement is right for you. Your safest bet is a multivitamin supplement that provides 100% of the RDA. It will provide you with all of the vitamins you need, but not too much.

## Introducing the Vitamins

### Vitamin A

Vitamin A is important for vision. It also helps keep your skin and bones healthy. Beta carotene, a precursor to vitamin A, gives some fruits and vegetables



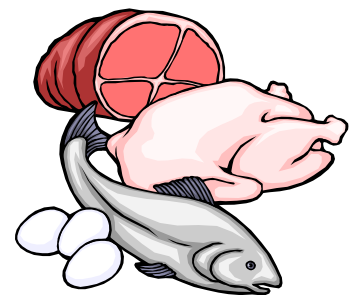
their orange or yellow color. Beta carotene is an antioxidant which helps protect your body against free radicals.

Sources include: egg yolks, fortified milk and dairy products, carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, mango, apricots, papaya, peaches, cantaloupe, and melon.

### B Vitamins

There are several vitamins that are grouped under the B vitamin category. They include: thiamin (B1), riboflavin (B2), niacin (B3), pantothenic acid, pyridoxine (B6), cyanocobalamin (B12), & folic acid. The B vitamins are needed for releasing energy from food.

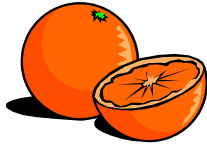
Sources include: whole grains, dried beans and peas, enriched and fortified grain products, meat, fish, dairy products, and eggs.



### Food Stamps:

To find out if you or someone you know qualifies for food stamps, call 1-800-221-5689.

## Vitamin C (ascorbic acid)



Long ago, when ships traveled the seas, the one thing that sailors feared was a disease called scurvy. It was discovered that eating limes helped to “cure” scurvy. It was the vitamin C in the limes that helped treat scurvy. Vitamin C is important in helping maintain and repair tissues and is also an antioxidant. Unfortunately, most studies show that vitamin C does not prevent colds.

Sources include: citrus fruits (such as oranges), melon, berries, kiwifruit, fortified cereals, potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, tomatoes, and fruit juices.

## Vitamin D

This vitamin is unique because we can make vitamin D from sunlight. It helps you absorb the calcium from your gut and it helps to promote bone growth.

Sources include: vitamin D-fortified milk, and egg yolks.

## Vitamin E

Vitamin E is another antioxidant vitamin that is needed for healthy cells.

Sources include: vegetable oil, whole grains, and nuts.

## Vitamin K

Vitamin K is made in your body by bacteria in your gut (not all bacteria are bad). When you take antibiotics, you kill these bacteria in your gut. Sometimes doctors will recommend a vitamin K supplement for this reason. Vitamin K is important for normal blood clotting.

Sources include: green leafy vegetables.

## Questions and Answers



### **Q: What is the difference between vitamins and minerals?**

**A:** Vitamins are organic compounds (containing carbon) required by the body in tiny amounts to promote healthy cells. Minerals are inorganic compounds, which include iron, calcium, magnesium, sodium, etc. Vitamins and minerals are found in a variety of foods. If taken in excess, both can cause problems. Some are needed only in small amounts measured in micrograms; others are needed in large amounts measured in grams.

### **Q: What are “DRIs”?**

**A:** The Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) is a set of reference values that include both RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) and AI (Adequate Intake) determined by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council. Each vitamin and most minerals have its own RDA or AI. The AI is the average intake needed. The RDA is set to meet the needs of almost all individuals in a given population group. They are designed to be used as guidelines for the recommended intake of nutrients needed for healthy individuals. There is a large measure of safety incorporated in each RDA. If you get 2/3 of the RDA, it is generally okay.

## Vitamin-Packed Recipes

Fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins and minerals, and they are also great sources of fiber. Try the two recipes below and help ensure that you get all the vitamins and minerals you need.

### Stir-Fry

#### Ingredients:

1/2 pound lean beef, pork, or chicken, sliced into thin strips	1 cup bean sprouts (optional)
2/3 cup carrots, sliced thin	1/8 tsp soy sauce
1/3 cup celery, sliced thin	1/3 cup water
1/3 cup onions, sliced thin	2 Tbsp vegetable oil
1 cup broccoli, chopped	1 Tbsp cornstarch
	1/2 tsp ground ginger

#### Directions:

1. Combine cornstarch, ginger, soy sauce, and water and set aside.
2. Heat 1 Tbsp oil in wok or large frying pan over high heat. When oil is hot, add meat strips, stir until lightly cooked, about 5 minutes. Remove meat and set aside.
3. Add remaining oil to pan. Add carrots, onions, and celery and cook 1 minute. Add broccoli and cook 2 minutes. Add liquid mixture and cook 1 minute or until bubbly. Add bean sprouts and meat; cook 2 minutes.

Serves 4 - 5.

### Fruit Salad and Dressing

#### Ingredients:

1 8-ounce can chunk pineapple, drained	1 Tbsp lemon juice
1 Tbsp cornstarch	4 apples, diced into 1/2-inch chunks
2 Tbsp frozen apple juice concentrate	Seedless grapes
	Strawberries

#### Directions:

1. Drain canned pineapple and add enough water to make one cup.
2. Add cornstarch to pineapple mixture. Place in saucepan and stir. Cook until clear. This will be very thick.
3. Remove from heat and immediately add the apple juice concentrate and lemon juice.
4. Serve with pineapple chunks, apples, grapes and strawberries or any fruit combination desired.