

Vitamins

	POSSIBLE BENEFITS	BEST SOURCES	HIGH-DOSE RISKS
VITAMIN A/ BETA-CAROTENE <small>RDA*</small> <small>Men: 5,000 IU</small> <small>Women: 4,000 IU</small>	Beta-carotene is converted to vitamin A, which helps cells develop, advances bone and tooth growth, and boosts the body's immune system. You also need vitamin A to help you see at night.	You're well on your way to getting enough if you regularly eat dairy products and eggs or baked goods made with eggs. Leafy green vegetables, carrots, broccoli, cantaloupe, peaches, and squash are also great sources.	Vitamin A is generally safe up to 10,000 IU daily, but toxic above 50,000 IU. During pregnancy, single doses of 20,000 IU or more can cause birth defects. Beta-carotene is believed safe up to 83,000 IU per day, but supplements have been shown to increase the risk of lung cancer in smokers.
VITAMIN B-6 <small>RDA</small> <small>Men: 2 mg</small> <small>Women: 1.6 mg</small>	B-6 helps the body process proteins, fats, and carbohydrates. Works with other vitamins and minerals to supply energy to the muscles. Aids in the production of blood cells. Important for a healthy immune system.	Chicken, fish, pork, liver, eggs, spinach, potatoes, bananas, whole wheat bread, peanut butter—the list is so long and varied that most people don't have to worry about getting enough.	A safe maximum has not been set. Taking 100 mg per day for more than six months can cause nerve damage; 2,000 mg daily can cause damage within a much shorter time.
VITAMIN B-12 <small>RDA</small> <small>Men: 2 mcg</small> <small>Women: 2 mcg</small>	B-12 helps the body use fats and carbohydrates. Important in cell development, especially blood cells. Also helps the nervous system work properly.	Meats, chicken, fish, and dairy products are great sources. B-12 is added to some breakfast cereals.	Believed safe up to 100 mcg daily. No known risks.
VITAMIN C <small>RDA</small> <small>Men: 60 mg</small> <small>Women: 60 mg</small>	Vitamin C is needed to produce collagen, which makes up connective tissue. Acts as an antioxidant, protecting cells from natural destruction that occurs with aging. Not proven to prevent colds, but studies have found that big doses—around 2,000 mg a day—can make cold symptoms milder.	If you eat fruits or vegetables every day—especially citrus fruits, broccoli, leafy greens, red and green peppers—you're probably over the RDA.	Generally safe up to 1,000 mg daily. Doses around 10,000 mg per day can cause diarrhea.
VITAMIN D <small>RDA</small> <small>Men: 400 IU</small> <small>Women: 400 IU</small>	Vitamin D regulates the formation and repair of bone and cartilage. It also controls the amount of calcium and phosphorus you absorb from foods.	If you drink milk regularly, you're getting plenty. Your body also forms vitamin D when exposed to the sun. Older men and women should consider daily supplements to protect their bones.	Safe up to 1,000 IU daily. Any extra supplements may be risky if you drink more than a quart of milk daily. Doses of 5,000 IU per day or more can cause irreversible kidney and heart damage.
VITAMIN E <small>RDA</small> <small>Men: 30 IU</small> <small>Women: 24 IU</small>	Vitamin E appears highly effective in preventing heart disease. It is an antioxidant, protecting cells from natural destruction that occurs with aging. Helps prevent blood clots. Needed for red blood cell production.	Vegetable oil, margarine, meats, nuts, and leafy greens provide plenty. Most Americans get enough to meet the RDA. To protect the heart, a 400 IU daily supplement is best.	Safe up to 800 IU daily, though the body doesn't readily absorb more than 400 IU per day.
FOLIC ACID <small>RDA</small> <small>Men: 400 mcg</small> <small>Women: 400 mcg</small>	Low folic acid levels increase your risk of dying from coronary heart disease. Also regulates embryo and fetal development: Low levels increase a woman's chance of having a baby with neurological defects. Needed for red blood cell production.	If you eat lots of leafy greens, peas and beans, citrus fruits, or whole grain breads and cereals, you're probably getting enough. Women planning pregnancy should make sure to eat plenty of these foods or take a supplement to prevent birth defects.	A safe maximum has not been set. Doses above 1,000 mcg per day may increase zinc loss and can mask vitamin B-12 deficiency, opening the door to irreversible nerve damage.
NIACIN <small>RDA</small> <small>Men: 15 mg</small> <small>Women: 15 mg</small>	Niacin aids in processing fat and producing sugar. It helps tissues get rid of waste materials. It also lowers cholesterol levels in the blood, reducing the risk of heart disease.	Plentiful in meats, niacin is also formed in the body from protein in eggs and milk. It's added to the flour in breads, pasta, and other products—so most people in the U.S. get plenty.	Safe maximum has not been set. Niacin capsules can cause flushing, tingling, and rashes. They can also cause liver damage.

*RDA=recommended daily allowance, IU=international units, mg=milligrams, mcg=micrograms