

Vitamin C

Why We Need It

Vitamin C, a water-soluble vitamin, also is known as ascorbic acid. It has a wide variety of uses in the body, including helping to slow down or prevent cell damage. It also is needed to maintain healthy body tissues and the immune system. Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron from plant foods.

Recommended Daily Intakes of Vitamin C

	Age	Vitamin C (mg/day)	
Infants	birth–6 months	40	
	6 months–1 year	50	
Children	1–3 years	15	
	4–8 years	25	
Males	9–13 years	45	
	14-18 years	75	
	19 years and over	90	
Females	9–13 years	45	
	14-18 years	65	
	19 years and over	75	
	pregnant	≤ 18	80
		19-50	85
	breastfeeding	≤ 18	115
19-50		120	

mg = milligrams

Source: adapted from the Dietary Reference Intakes series, National Academies Press. Copyright 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, by the National Academies of Sciences.

People who smoke need an additional 35 mg of vitamin C every day.

Sources

The best way to get enough vitamin C is through foods rather than supplements. Fruits and vegetables are the best sources.

Sources of Vitamin C

Food	Vitamin C (mg/ serving)
red or yellow sweet pepper, raw, medium	225
papaya, 1 medium	190
strawberries, halved, 1 cup	90
orange, 1 medium	80
cantaloupe, ¼ medium melon	50
potato, baked, 1 medium	20
mg = milligrams oz = ounces	

Vegetarians should include a vitamin C-rich food at every meal to help increase iron absorption, since the iron in vegetarian foods is not well absorbed.

Some juices and cereals have vitamin C added. The amount of vitamin C in each product varies. Check the nutrition label to see how much vitamin C the product contributes to your daily need.

Ways to Retain It

Vitamin C is easily destroyed during preparation, cooking, or storage. To retain vitamin C, follow these tips:

- Eat raw fruits and vegetables as soon as possible after buying them.
- Cut vegetables just before eating or cooking.
- Cook vitamin C-rich foods quickly in as little water as possible.
- Microwave, steam, or stir-fry to retain the most vitamin C.

If We Don't Get Enough

A deficiency of vitamin C is rare, because it is found in many foods we eat. *Scurvy*, the disease caused by vitamin C deficiency, was common a few generations ago. At that time it was prevalent among seamen who lived on dried and salted foods for months at a time. Today scurvy is rare in the United States, but not getting enough vitamin C can lead to anemia, bleeding gums, infections, and poor wound healing.

Supplements

Healthy individuals who eat plenty of fruits and vegetables rarely need vitamin C supplements. Taking vitamin C supplements does not prevent colds. Some studies show that vitamin C supplements may decrease the duration of a cold.

High Doses

Do not get more than 2000 mg/day of vitamin C from both foods and supplements. Although excess vitamin C is mostly eliminated in the urine, high doses can cause headaches, frequent urination, diarrhea and nausea. People with a history of kidney stones should avoid high levels of vitamin C.

For More Information

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your county Extension office may have more written information and nutrition classes for you to attend. Also, your doctor, health care provider, or a registered dietitian (RD) can provide reliable information.

Reliable nutrition information may be found on the Internet at the following sites:

<http://hgic.clemson.edu>

<http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/NIRC/>

<http://www.eatright.org>

<http://www.nutrition.gov>

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic>

Sources:

1. Bobroff, Linda B. and Isabel Valentin-Oquendo. University of Florida Extension. *Facts About Vitamin C*. FCS8702. April 2006. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publications.html>
2. National Academies of Sciences. National Academies Press. *Dietary Reference Intakes series*. 2004.

This information has been reviewed and adapted for use in South Carolina by Janis G. Hunter, HGIC Nutrition Specialist, and Katherine L. Cason, Professor, State Program Leader for Food Safety and Nutrition, Clemson University. (New 07/07.)

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