

The Complete Guide To **VITAMIN C**

More Than 10 Key Health Benefits

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What Is Vitamin C

According to the National Institutes of Health, Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant and water-soluble vitamin, also known as ascorbic acid, and it is found abundantly in fruits and vegetables. It aids the body in forming and maintaining connective tissue, blood vessels, skin, and bones.

Experts say that vitamin C is one of the most efficient and safest nutrients. While it may not cure the common cold, it does reduce the risks of contracting one and helps to ease symptoms and there are other wide reaching benefits to the vitamin, including protecting against eye disease, skin wrinkling, prenatal health issues, immune system deficiencies, and cardiovascular disease.



The Role Of Vitamin C In The Body

Vitamin C is necessary in the growth, expansion, and restoration of tissue within the body. It's also involved in many bodily functions, such as absorbing iron, healing wounds, boosting the immune system, forming collagen, maintaining teeth, cartilage, and bones.

Additionally, vitamin C is an antioxidant that protects against free radicals, pollutants, and toxic chemicals. When free radicals are allowed to build up they contribute to a number of health conditions, including arthritis, heart disease, and cancer.

Our body doesn't store supplies of vitamin C, any excess of the vitamin will be excreted, so there's no need to worry about overdosing. However, it is important to stick to the limits, because overdoing it can result in diarrhea and an upset stomach.

Vitamin C must be supplied continuously through the diet, just as any water-soluble vitamin must be. Thus, it is vital to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables that are rich in vitamin C. It's important to cook them losing minimal water so you don't lose valuable vitamins and minerals. The body easily absorbs it, whether through pill or food form, but it can be enhanced when taken in combination of iron.

How Vitamin C Benefits Health

According to The University of Maryland Health Center there a wide range of health benefits with vitamin C, and some of them may just surprise you.

- **The Common Cold** – There is no cure for the common cold, however, The Mayo Clinic states that it can shorten the duration of the illness. It can also be of benefit to anyone who is exposed to the cold frequently, such as children, teachers, medical professionals, and anyone who works in the retail or hospitality industry. Additionally, vitamin C can prevent the cold or flu turning into a lung infection or pneumonia.
- **Stroke** – Some studies have shown that people with high levels of vitamin C in their system have a much lower risk of having a stroke versus those with low levels of vitamin C. At this stage, we don't understand the *why*, but we do know that people who consume plenty of fruits and vegetables have high levels of vitamin C in their blood.
- **Stress** – Stress weakens the immune system, which may be why vitamin C can be efficiently used to relieve its symptoms. Vitamin C is incredibly sensitive to high levels of stress; so, for anyone who is overweight, smoked, or consumes a large amount of alcohol, vitamin C levels become depleted.
- **Skin Health** – It doesn't just affect the inside of your body, but also the outside. Studies have shown that there is a link between skin aging and nutrient intake. The study examined over 4,000 women (aged between 40 and 74) and women who had higher intakes of vitamin C had less wrinkles, and were less likely to experience skin dryness.



- **Hypertension** – Individuals with hypertension are at greater risk for developing heart disease, and vitamin C can reduce high blood pressure.
- **Vasodilation** – Vitamin C is effective in treating high cholesterol, high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, angina pectoris, and congestive heart failure. This is down to the fact that vitamin C can improve the dilation of blood vessels, thus protecting heart health.
- **Cataracts** – The most common visual condition, cataracts are commonly associated with low levels of vitamin C. Increasing your Intake can increase the supply of blood to the body's ocular areas.
- **Healing Wounds** – As mentioned above, vitamin C helps with the growth of connective tissues, thus the vitamin can increase the speed of wounds healing.
- **Cancer** – Studies published by The National Cancer Institute suggest that vitamin C can slow the growth of a variety of cancer types, including the esophagus, lungs, vocal cords, colon, stomach, mouth, throat, pancreas, and rectum.
- **Mood** – The vitamin also plays a vital role in producing neurotransmitters, such as norepinephrine. This can affect your mood and these are critical to the brain's proper functioning.



- **Immunity** – Another important health benefit from vitamin C is one we touched on above- immunity. It's known for its bolstering of the immune system and for stimulating white blood vessels.



- **Asthma** – Vitamin C can protect your body against the effects of pollution, thus reducing asthma and asthma-like symptoms.
- **Heart Disease** – Adequate levels of Vitamin C are essential in the protection of blood vessels against damage caused by free radicals. This may be one of the major causes of atherosclerosis. The vitamin C is a preventative agent against this particular heart disease, and others.

Recommended Daily Allowance

The National Institutes of Health recommends the following daily allowance of vitamin C for adults over the age of 19:

- **Men** – men should ensure they get 90 milligrams of vitamin C every day
- **Women** – women should be consuming 75 milligrams of vitamin C every day
- **Pregnant women** – pregnant women need 85 milligrams of vitamin C every day
- **Breastfeeding women** – for women who are breastfeeding, it's a much higher expectation with 120 milligrams of vitamin C every day
- **Smokers** – Since smoking (and heavy alcohol use) depletes stores of vitamin C, smokers should aim to consume 250 milligrams of vitamin C every day.

When treating illnesses, it is generally a dose of 1,000 milligrams of vitamin C every day, however, no one should be consuming over 2,000 milligrams of vitamin C.

Food Sources Of Vitamin C

There are plenty of food sources that contain vitamin C, and these foods are rich in other important vitamins and minerals.

- Bell peppers – red, green, yellow and orange
- Citrus fruits - oranges, lemons and limes
- Broccoli
- Apples
- Asparagus
- Kiwi
- Berries – strawberries, raspberries
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Honeydew melon
- Mango
- Cantaloupe
- Watermelon
- Papaya
- Kale
- Spinach
- Brussels sprouts
- Pineapple
- Tomatoes
- Cabbage
- Winter squash
- Potatoes
- Fortified foods such as cereal, breads, and grains



The best way to get your daily dose of vitamin C is through your diet, rather than turning to supplements. You should aim to consume at least 9 servings of vegetables and fruits every day. This will provide you with a healthy dose of the C vitamin, as well as a bounty of other minerals, vitamins, and phytochemicals necessary for your overall health, and in preventing disease

Half a cup of red pepper or a cup of fresh orange juice is enough to achieve your recommended daily allowance, however, if you'd like to change things up there are a variety of options:

- 1 cup of cantaloupe equates to 59 milligrams of vitamin C
- 1 cup of tomato juice is worth 45 milligrams
- 1 medium sized kiwi equates to 70 milligrams of vitamin C
- 1 cup of cooked broccoli will rack up 74 milligrams
- Half a cup of green pepper is 60 milligrams of vitamin C
- Half a cup of red cabbage is 40 milligrams of vitamin C

According to the Journal of Nutrition, there are a large number of Americans failing to get enough vitamin C. This is particularly true for those who smoke, drink excessively, and also non-Hispanic black men.

Creative Ways To Get More Vitamin C

There are some creative ways to work more fruits and vegetables in your diet, why not try the following tips?

- Pre-prepare fruits and vegetables by cutting them up and storing them in baggies in the fridge. You'll have them handy for a quick snack.
- Add grated or pureed vegetables and fruits to add to recipes for brownies, soups, muffins, meatloaf, cookies, and more.
- Slice fruit and freeze it for an ice-cold summer treat that can replace popsicles.
- Any time you're making a sandwich or a wrap, be sure to include tomatoes, dark lettuce options like spinach, and make your own slaw.
- Enjoy raw vegetables as a snack with a low-fat dip, homemade salsa, or hummus. It increases your healthy intake *and* prevents you from eating junk food.
- Add berries to salads, muffins, cereal, and pancakes.
- Enjoy dried or fresh fruit in your cereal.
- Start your day with a homemade smoothie, which includes orange juice, berries, spinach, and whatever other flavors you love.



There isn't any magic potion to getting enough vitamin C, what's important is eating a well-balanced diet.

Supplement Considerations

Obviously, the greatest source of any vitamin, mineral or nutrient is a natural one. When would supplements be appropriate?

Oral contraceptives, aspirin, nicotine products, barbiturates, and tetracyclines can all reduce the level of vitamin C in your body. If you are taking these products or you're a smoker, you should increase your vitamin C intake. Talk to your doctor about vitamin C supplements.

Additionally, there may be adverse effects for patients who take anticoagulants, so if you are taking warfarin or any related prescription medication you should speak to your doctor about your vitamin C intake and steer clear of supplements.

Vitamin C is considered safe when obtained from supplements or food sources. The side effects are rare, but consuming too much vitamin C can result in nausea, an upset stomach, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, and other gastrointestinal issues. The majority of healthy people can hold/use up to 250 mg of vitamin C every day, excess amounts are passed through urine.

During illness, injury, or extreme stress, the body will use higher amounts of vitamin C. Consuming over 2,000 milligrams of vitamin C daily can contribute to the symptoms mentioned above, as well as kidney stones.

Health Risks From Deficiency

Vitamin C deficiencies are incredibly rare, despite the fact that many US adults fail to get enough of it in their diet. Extreme deficiencies result in scurvy, the symptoms of which include anemia, bleeding, weakness, loose teeth, and bleeding. During the initial years of global exploration many sailors were dying from scurvy. It was James Lind, a Scottish doctor, who conducted an experiment showing that citrus fruit could cure/prevent the disease. However, it wasn't until the 1930s that vitamin C was discovered.

10 Warning Signs Of Vitamin C Deficiency

- **Easy bruising** – Bruising is the result of blood vessels bursting near the surface of the skin. It's a completely normal and natural response to getting a knock or having a fall.

There is a certain level of bruising that is expected- if you're experiencing unexplained bruises it *may* be a sign that you're not getting enough vitamin C. Even a minor deficiency can increase the likelihood of bruising. If you bruise easily, increase your vitamin C intake to see if that has any effect. If it doesn't, you should see your doctor- easy bruising is a sign of other serious illnesses.



- **Inflamed, bleeding, or swollen gums** – Oral health issues are commonly linked with low levels of vitamin C, this includes gums that are inflamed, bleeding, or swollen, as well as persistent mouth ulcers. Collagen supports your gums and the gums lose around 20% of that every day, which means regular intake of vitamin C is vital for the health of your gums and teeth.

- **Slow wound healing** – If you've noticed that you have cuts and scrapes on your body that are taking forever to heal, it's time to take a closer look at what you're eating. Vitamin C is essential to producing collagen, and it's this connective tissue that will improve healing. The link has been recognized since 1937 and it was surgeons from Harvard Medical School that noted this. Vitamin C is an immune booster, as well as a powerful antioxidant, and both of these encourage speedier healing.
- **Dry and splitting hair and/or nails** – If you want strong nails and a healthy head of hair, then your diet should be your number one consideration. As far as bodily tissue goes, hair is considered non-essential, thus nutrients are first sent to the most important tissues and organs before they can get to the hair. Thus, if you fail to get the ideal levels of vitamin C, you'll see it in your hair and nails. It's also vital in absorbing iron, and iron deficiency can result in slow hair growth, hair loss, and brittle nails.
- **Dry, Rough, and Red Skin** – One of the initial symptoms of scurvy is dry skin, which is due to a lack of collagen. Another common (yet harmless) skin issue that comes as a result of low levels of vitamin C is keratosis pilaris. This causes hard and small bumps on the face, buttocks, thighs, and arms. There's no need to panic, though, you just need to up your intake of vitamin C to clear it right up. Not only that, but it can improve the appearance of your skin, and offset the damage caused by UV rays.
- **Depression & Fatigue** – So many illnesses are accompanied by the symptoms of depression and fatigue, so it may be difficult to identify an issue based on this alone. However, if you are dealing with these symptoms as well as some of the other symptoms on this list, then it may be a vitamin C deficiency. There is a known link between the psychological state and a vitamin C deficiency. The Mayo Clinic [points](#) to studies involving hospitalized patients, as they often have low levels of vitamin C. The study found that by providing said patients with supplements their mood improved up to 34%.

- **Frequent Nosebleeds** – Around 90% of nosebleeds are the result of the capillaries located at the front of the nose. An inadequate intake of vitamin C leaves these blood vessels fragile, resulting in regular nosebleeds. If you experience nosebleeds frequently, or you've started to get them more than usual, it could be down to vitamin C.
- **Unexplained Weight Gain** – Low levels of vitamin C result in a rise in waist circumference and body fat. Arizona State University researchers discovered that how much vitamin C we absorb affects the body's ability to use fat as a source of fuel when at rest and during exercise. The study lasted for four weeks and included 20 obese individuals who were given 67% of the RDA of vitamin C and assigned a low-fat diet. Additionally, they were given a placebo or a 500-milligram capsule of vitamin C every day. At the start of the trial those with low levels of vitamin C had the highest body fat, but throughout the study this dropped by 11%.
- **Painful & Swollen Joints** – Swelling and pain in your joints could be a result of an inflammatory arthritis, but it may be a sign that it's time for a diet overhaul. The Arthritis Foundation conducted a study that showed people with low levels of vitamin C were 3 times more likely to have rheumatoid arthritis compared to those who consumed enough of the vitamin.
- **Poor Immune Function** – We rely on our immune system to protect our body from illness, infection, and disease. This can be influenced strongly by our intake of vitamins and minerals, particularly vitamin C. There are numerous cells within our immune systems that need vitamin C to perform basic tasks, so a deficiency diminishes resistance against pathogens. Vitamin C keeps your body in prime condition, and reduces the risk of disease, as well as the severity and duration of the illness.

People At Risk For Deficiency

If you're worried about some of the above symptoms and feel as though you may be at risk for deficiency, then you should increase your intake. As you'll see from the recommended daily allowances you can consume considerably more than that safely in a day. So, before you go running to your doctor try bumping up your vitamin C intake.

As we mentioned above, a vitamin C deficiency is incredibly rare, though many people fail to consume enough. In fact, around 31% of Americans aren't getting enough vitamin C.

However, some people are at greater risk of deficiency than others:

- People who are dependent on alcohol and/or drugs
- People who frequently partake in highly restrictive diets
- Pregnant women
- Breastfeeding women
- The elderly, who tend to eat a diet which is less varied
- Smokers are at a higher risk because nicotine products absorb vitamin C from foods and from the body more quickly. Smokers should increase their intake to 250 milligrams daily
- People who don't eat a healthy balanced diet including daily doses of fruits and vegetables
- People who have medical conditions affecting their capacity to digest and absorb foods, such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease

Final Thoughts

Just as any vitamin is important to our health and wellness, we can see just how crucial vitamin C is to our bodies. It assists in reducing the effects of aging, in producing collagen, *and* in boosting our immune system to protect against a variety of diseases and illnesses. Severe vitamin C deficiencies may be rare, and while it's not likely to result in any modern American deaths, it can be the cause of serious and unpleasant illnesses.

The best way to achieve your recommended daily allowance of vitamin C (and more) is through including fruits and vegetables in your diet. If you are unable to consume enough of those to achieve your RDA, then you may want to consider supplements. However, you should consult your doctor if you have any diagnosed illnesses, or you're on any of the medications discussed above.



What is evident through further breakdown of just how important this vitamin is, is how significant your diet is. It truly is the crux of your health and wellness. If you ensure that your diet is healthy and balanced, you won't need to worry about supplements making up the shortfall.

It's time to take a look at your diet and determine whether you are making the right decisions on a daily basis. Are you one of those 31% of Americans that is failing to achieve the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C?