



What you should know about Vitamin B12

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Vitamin B12 is an essential part of life. It plays a key role in the normal functioning of the brain and nervous

system and for the formation of blood. More than that, B12 is involved in the metabolism of every cell of the human body, especially affecting DNA synthesis and regulation.

This vitamin, so essential to healthy bodies, is found in many foods including eggs, meat, dairy products, poultry and shellfish as well as in fortified foods like soy milk and cereals. The amount of B12 needed to stay healthy is minute, just 2.4 micrograms per day (that's 2.4 thousands of a gram).

While abundant, getting B12 from food involves a complex chemical process which may not be sufficient in some people. For example, a person who consumes no animal products will be susceptible to a deficiency of the vitamin. Older people may have changes to their digestive tracts that affect their ability to absorb vitamins leading to incomplete absorption. Poor diet and excessive drinking can also contribute to deficiency of B12. Another at-risk group are people with diseases of the intestinal track like Crohn's or celiac disease, those who have had chronic pancreatitis and anyone taking certain drugs for gout, seizures or diabetes (metformin).

B12 works in conjunction with other B vitamins such as folic acid and B6 to keep an aging brain healthy. Getting too little B12 it risks pernicious anemia, a decrease in red blood cells that occurs when your intestines cannot properly absorb the vitamin.

Initially, low B12 levels may show no symptoms or very subtle ones that are easily ignored or missed. Vitamin B12 deficiency anemia, as it worsens, may cause symptoms such as weakness, tiredness or light-headedness, rapid heartbeat and breathing, pale skin, sore tongue, stomach upset and weight loss, diarrhea or constipation.

Not corrected, the next stage will damage nerve cells leading to tingling or numbness in fingers and toes, difficulty walking, mood changes or depression, memory loss, disorientation and dementia. We may well dismiss the early symptoms as "just getting old." Don't fall for it!

How much B12 does the body need? Microscopic amounts, actually. A healthy body requires about 2.4 micrograms (that is 2.4 one-thousandths of a gram) per day—easily available from most diets. The value

to the body is emphasized by the liver's ability to store B12 for long periods, months' even years' worth.

Most people over 50 do not have to worry about B12 levels if they eat animal products.

However, should there be any

of the symptoms mentioned, it would be wise to discuss the possibility of B12 deficiency with your doctor. Ignoring the signs will do no good and may lead to much greater problems.

For someone who is getting too little B12, or not properly absorbing it, supplements are an option. Before making that decision, find out if you really need it. All it takes is a simple blood test.

B12 works in conjunction with other B vitamins... to keep an aging brain healthy.