



## BHS Medical Department

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# Vitamin C

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### What is Vitamin C and what does it do?

- Vitamin C is a water soluble nutrient.
- In the body, it acts as an antioxidant, helping to protect cells from the damage caused by free radicals. Free radicals are compounds formed when our bodies convert the food we eat into energy. People are also exposed to free radicals in the environment from cigarette smoke, air pollution, and ultraviolet light from the sun.
- The body also needs Vitamin C to make collagen, a protein required to help wounds heal.
- Vitamin C improves the absorption of iron from plant-based foods.
- It helps the immune system work properly to protect the body from disease.
- It has anti-inflammatory properties, and influences cellular immunity.
- Vitamin C helps prevent cardiovascular disease.

### Vitamin C and COVID-19

There is insufficient data for the COVID-19 to recommend either for or against the use of Vitamin C for the treatment of COVID-19 in non-critically ill patients.

### How much Vitamin C do I need?

The amount of Vitamin C you need each day depends on your age.

### What foods provide Vitamin C?

- Fruits and vegetables are the best sources of Vitamin C.
- Citrus fruits such as oranges and grapefruit and their juices, kiwi, strawberries, cantaloupe, tomatoes as well as red and green pepper, broccoli and baked potatoes.
- Some foods and beverages are fortified with Vitamin C.
- The Vitamin C content of food may be reduced by prolonged storage and by cooking. Steaming or microwaving may lessen cooking losses. Fortunately, many of the best food sources of Vitamin C such as fruits and vegetables are usually eaten raw.

### Am I getting enough Vitamin C?

- Most people get enough vitamin C from foods and beverages.
- People with certain medical conditions are more likely than others to have trouble getting enough Vitamin C.
- People who smoke and those who are exposed to second hand smoke need more Vitamin C than non-smokers.

### What happens if I don't get enough vitamin C?

Vitamin C deficiency is rare, causes fatigue, inflammation and bleeding gums, loosening and loss of teeth, small red spots on the skin, joint pain, poor wound healing, corkscrew hairs, and depression.

### What are some effects of Vitamin C on health?

Vitamin C has long been a popular remedy for the common cold. Research shows that for most people Vitamin C supplements do not reduce the risk of getting the common cold. However, people who take Vitamin C supplements regularly might have slightly shorter colds or somewhat milder symptoms when they do have a cold. Using Vitamin C supplements after cold symptoms start does not appear to be helpful.

### **Can Vitamin C be harmful?**

- Taking too much Vitamin C can cause diarrhoea, nausea, and stomach cramps.
- High doses of Vitamin C could worsen some medical condition and damage body tissues.

### **Does Vitamin C interact with medications or other dietary supplements?**

Vitamin C dietary supplements can interact or interfere with medicines you take. Tell your doctor about any dietary supplements and medicines you take. They can tell you if they might interact or interfere with your prescription or over-the-counter medicines.

People should get most of their nutrients from food and beverages. Foods contain vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre and other components that benefit health. In some cases, fortified foods and dietary supplements are useful when it is not possible otherwise to meet the needs for one or more nutrients. This information should not take the place of medical advice. We encourage you to talk to your doctor about your interest in dietary supplements and what may be best for your overall health.

*Ref: CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

*Ref: National Institutes of Health*