



BHS Medical Department

Zinc

What is zinc and what does it do?

- Zinc is a nutrient that people need to stay healthy.
- It helps the immune system fight off invading bacteria and viruses.
- Zinc helps wounds heal and helps the skin stay healthy.
- Zinc is important for proper senses of taste and smell.

Zinc and COVID-19

There is insufficient data to recommend either for or against the use of zinc for the treatment of COVID-19.

How much zinc do I need?

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

What foods provide zinc?

Zinc is found in oysters, crab, lobsters, red meat, poultry and fortified breakfast cereals, beans, nuts, whole grains, and dairy products.

Am I getting enough zinc?

- Most people get enough zinc from the foods they eat.
- Certain people who have some health problems are more likely than others to have trouble getting enough zinc.
- Vegetarians, because they do not eat meat which is a good source of zinc, may not get enough zinc.
- Alcoholics, because alcoholic beverages decrease the amount of zinc that the body absorbs and increase the amount lost in the urine, may not have enough zinc.

What happens if I don't get enough zinc?

- Zinc deficiency causes slow growth in infants and children.
- Delayed sexual development in adolescents and impotence in men.
- Zinc deficiency also causes hair loss, diarrhoea, eye sores, weight loss, and loss of appetite.
- Problems with wound healing and skin sores.
- Decreased ability to taste food.
- Lower alertness levels can also occur.
- People who have low levels of zinc might have a higher risk of getting pneumonia and other infections.

Can zinc be harmful?

Yes, if you get too much. Signs of too much zinc:

- Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, and headaches.

When people take too much zinc for a long time:

- Could lead to lower immunity, and low levels of HDL cholesterol (the "good" cholesterol).
- Can cause neurological problems, including numbness and weakness in the arms and legs.

Are there any interactions with zinc that I should know about?

Yes. Zinc dietary supplements can interact or interfere with medicines that you take and, in some cases, medicines can lower zinc levels in the body.

Tell your doctor about any dietary supplements and medicines you take. They can tell you if those dietary supplements might interact or interfere with your prescription or over-the-counter medicines or if the medicines might interfere with how your body absorbs, uses, or breaks down nutrients.

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.