

Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine)

RDA - 2 mg.

Basically:

- It is lost during processing and cooking, and is destroyed by sunlight. Store foods containing it in the dark.
- We cannot store it in the body, and it passes quickly through the body and out in the urine. So, we need to keep levels up by regular intake via food or as a supplement if necessary.

Where do you get it ?

Sources of vitamin B6 include beef, chicken, eggs, fish, bananas, potatoes and sunflower seeds. Intestinal bacteria can make some vitamin B6.

Actions:

Vitamin B6 is an important vitamin, which is involved in many processes in your body. It works to make the chemicals that transmit nerve impulses, and in making red blood cells. It has a role in keeping your immune system in good order, it plays a part in keeping female hormones in balance and it keeps the skin healthy.

Too little:

The wide availability of vitamin B6 means that major deficiency is rare. However, minor deficiency can give a range of symptoms such as headache, mild depression, anxiety and irritability.

Too much:

Side effects are unlikely at doses below 500 mg a day, but governments are wary of doses much above 50 mg a day. There is little evidence that low doses have harmful effects.

Taking vitamin B6 in late evening might give you vivid dreams.

Supplement:

A general B vitamin complex will usually give all the vitamin B6 needed. Supplements are currently limited to 10 to 20 mg per tablet, and are usually recommended for women suffering from pre-menstrual syndrome. But, they can also be useful if you are on a calorie restricted diet or if you consume too much alcohol.

Vitamin B12 (cobalamin)

RDA - only 1 microgram.

Basically:

- You only need a small amount on a daily basis.
- Your liver stores vitamin B12, and under normal circumstances, the store will last for many years.

Where do you get it ?

You get it from liver, oily fish, dairy products and eggs.

Actions:

You need vitamin B12 to keep a healthy nervous system and to make red blood cells. It also stimulates the appetite, encourages growth and releases energy from food. It helps you fight infections, speeds thought and protects against allergies and cancer.

Too little:

Deficiency of the so-called “intrinsic factor” in the gut prevents it being absorbed from food. Over time the lack of B12 results in pernicious anaemia, which can be fatal if not treated.

Symptoms of pernicious anaemia include muscle weakness, mental slowness, confusion, poor co-ordination, shortness of breath, fatigue and numbness in the limbs.

Doctors treat pernicious anaemia by vitamin B12 injections for the rest of the patients’ life.

Too much:

Toxicity is rare even in high doses, as little is absorbed from the gut.

Supplement:

If you eat a strict vegan diet, you may need to supplement with vitamin B12. Supplements are most effective if other B vitamins, vitamin C and minerals are taken at the same time.