

VITAMIN B12 AND HEALTH

Why do we need vitamin B12?

Together with folate and vitamin B6, **vitamin B12** is needed for healthy red blood cells. In particular it is needed to prevent a type of anaemia called megaloblastic anaemia.
Vitamin B12 is also important for maintaining a healthy nervous system.

How much do I need?

Over the age of 15 years, males and females need **1.5 micrograms** per day. For women who are breastfeeding this figure increases to 2.0 micrograms per day. (Government Dietary Recommendations from the Dept. of Health, Public Health England 2016)

Where are the best sources found?

Vitamin B12 is naturally present in animal food products but may be added to other foods during their manufacture. The following list gives the (approximate) amount of vitamin B12 found in an average portion of food (cooked weight used):

Food	Average Portion (oz)	Average Portion (grams)	Vitamin B12 micrograms
MEAT			
Beef, lamb, pork	4	100	2.0
Duck	4	100	3.0
Kidney - lamb	4	100	79.0
Liver - chicken			49.0
- lamb	4	100	81.0
- ox			110.0
Liver pâté	2	50	4.0
FISH			
Cod (poached)	4	100	2.0
Coley (steamed)	4	100	5.0
Herring, kippers (grilled)	4	100	11.0
Sardines (in brine or oil)	2	50	14.0
Tuna (in brine or oil)	2	50	2.5
DAIRY			
Whole, semi and skimmed milk	1/3 pint	200mls	0.8
Cheddar cheese	1	30	0.4
Edam cheese	1	30	0.6
EGGS			
Boiled, poached, scrambled	one	one	0.6
CEREALS **			
Bran Flakes, Sultana Bran	2	50	0.7
Cornflakes and Rice Krispies	1½	40	0.4
Instant porridge (made with milk)	7½	210	1.0
MISCELLANEOUS			
Bovril	1 teaspoon	12	0.5
Marmite	1 teaspoon	10	0.1

** Many cereals have vitamin B12 added so it is worth checking the labels.

B12 TIPS

1. Milk

Having milk is one of the simplest ways to add vitamin B12 to your diet. You can maximise this even more by finding a vitamin B12 fortified cereal that you like. This will supplement the vitamin B12 in your body and help you achieve the recommended amount.

2. Seafood

Fish and seafood are just a few of the foods that are high with vitamin B12. They may not be everyday foods, but you should try and find creative ways to incorporate them into your diet as they have other good health benefits, particularly if you are deficient in vitamin B12.

3. Liver

You may not enjoy liver on its own but as it is such a rich source of vitamin B12, you could try having some liver pâté.

What if I do not eat these foods?

Vegetarians and vegans are at risk of having a low vitamin B12 intake.

Fortified Foods

Many foods are fortified with vitamin B12 and for vegetarians the following foods (in addition to some of the above foods) provide useful amounts of the vitamin:

- Fortified non milk alternatives e.g. soya, rice milk, oat milk, nut milks are fortified with vitamin B12. Check the label to ensure a fortified variety is chosen.
- Fortified vegetable stock, e.g. Vecon
- Certain brands of tinned pasta, e.g. Heinz Spaghetti, some breads, veggie burgers and similar vegetarian foods (check the labels)
- Other fortified foods e.g. seaweed, algae, spirulina and fermented plant foods like miso are **not** good sources of vitamin B12. They contain an inactive form of the vitamin which cannot be used by the human body.

The vitamin B12 found in beer, fermented foods and yeast is not a reliable source of this vitamin.

Supplements

If you are unable to take sufficient vitamin B12 in your diet you may wish to consider taking it as a tablet. The most available form to the body is called cyanocobalamin. Do not choose a supplement containing more than your recommended daily amount.

Further information:

The following websites may be of interest to you

<https://www.vegsoc.org> (Vegetarian Society)

<https://www.vegansociety.com> (Vegan Society)

<http://www.lnds.nhs.uk> (Leicestershire Nutrition and Dietetic Service)

Ask your GP/ Nurse to refer you to a Registered Dietitian if further advice is needed.