

7 Nutrients Lacking in Your Diet

A recent analysis of the 2001-2008 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) found most American adults do not maintain recommended levels of several key nutrients. Modern food processing, modern commercial farming methods and lifestyle all combine to greatly reduce the nutrient content of the typical American diet.

Here are the alarming results of this recent study.

1. Ninety-nine percent of people need more vitamin D. This nutrient supports a healthy mood, a strong immune system, reduced inflammation and the absorption of calcium. Your body primarily absorbs vitamin D from sunlight, but various lifestyle and environmental factors interrupt this process.

Few foods contain vitamin D, although small amounts may be found in fatty fish (tuna, salmon or mackerel), beef liver, cheese, egg yolks and vitamin D fortified foods (milk, yogurt, orange juice, cereal). For many, a supplement of 1000 IU per day may be necessary.

2. Ninety-eight percent need more vitamin E. This powerful antioxidant protects cells from free radicals. Vitamin E also supports healthy blood vessel function, blood clotting and the immune system.

The best source of vitamin E is wheat germ oil, with 1 tablespoon providing 100 percent of the daily value. Other sources include nuts, seeds, peanut butter and some oils (sunflower oil, soybean oil, corn oil, safflower oil). While naturally occurring vitamin E exists in eight chemical forms, alpha-tocopherol is the only form recognized to meet human requirements.

4. Eighty-two percent need more magnesium. This important nutrient plays a role in more than 300 bodily functions, including blood glucose control, blood pressure regulation, bone strengthening and the metabolism of carbohydrates, protein and fat.

Modern food processing removes many nutrients from food, especially magnesium. Groups most at risk for magnesium deficiency are older adults and adults with gastrointestinal diseases, type 2 diabetes or alcohol dependency.

Good food sources of magnesium are green leafy vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds and whole grains. In general, foods naturally containing dietary fiber also contain magnesium.

5. Seventy-eight percent need more vitamin A. Healthy eyes require adequate levels of this nutrient. Vitamin A also plays a key role in immune function and reproduction.

The highest concentrations of vitamin A are found in sweet potatoes. Other good food sources include beef liver, spinach, black-eyed peas, fish, milk, eggs, spinach and yellow or orange fruits and vegetables.

6. Sixty-nine percent need more calcium. This is the most abundant mineral in the body, and the vast majority of it is stored in your teeth and bones. The remaining calcium supports heart, muscle and nerve function. Some studies suggest that calcium, along with vitamin D, may also play a role in protecting against cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure—but more research is needed.

Dairy products (milk, cheese, and yogurt) contain the highest amounts of naturally occurring calcium. Other sources of calcium include calcium-fortified foods, dark leafy greens (kale, spinach, collards), soybeans and white beans.

7. Fifty-six percent need more vitamin C. A powerful antioxidant that protects against cell damage, vitamin C also

boosts the immune system and helps form collagen in the body. It's also an important ingredient in protein metabolism and synthesis of neurotransmitters.

Citrus fruits are one of the best sources of vitamin C. Other good sources of this power vitamin include sweet red peppers, orange juice, kiwi fruit, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cantaloupe.

Numerous adults need more omega-3 fatty acids. Numerous studies suggest this. Omega-3 fatty acids contribute to heart and brain health, as well as the reduction of inflammation.

Most people—especially those at risk for heart disease—need at least 1 gram of omega-3 per day. Good food sources are walnuts, ground flax seed, fatty fish such as salmon and salad dressing made with olive, canola or soybean oil. Since this is more than most people get in their diet, omega-3 supplements containing EPA + DHA may be beneficial.

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