Key vitamin and mineral needs

Getting adequate nutrition can be a challenge as you get older. With age, the number of calories or energy from food you need is lower so most everything you eat should provide good nutrition. As we age, the body is less efficient absorbing some nutrients. Our ability to taste food declines which can reduce our appetite. Some foods become difficult to chew or digest. Here are the top vitamins and nutrients to look out for -- and how to get enough (the RDA—Recommended Dietary Allowance).

**Vitamin B12** Helps build red blood cells, DNA, and maintain nerve function. Older adults do not absorb it as well as younger people. Sign of not getting enough: Weakness, heart palpitations and shortness of breath, pale skin, a smooth tongue, constipation, diarrhea, loss of appetite, numbness or tingling, muscle weakness, and problems walking, vision loss, and mental problems like depression, memory loss, or behavior changes.

**Good sources:** fish, meat, poultry, eggs, milk, and milk products.
RDA: 2.4 micrograms (ug).

**Folate/Folic Acid** Helps make DNA and other genetic material and cell division. Not getting enough can lead to anemia.

**Good sources:** Fortified bread, cereal, and pasta. Vegetables (especially asparagus, Brussels sprouts, and dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach and mustard greens). Fruits and fruit juices (especially oranges and orange juice). Nuts, beans, and peas.
RDA: 400 micrograms (ug).

**Vitamin B₆** Helps to maintain a healthy immune system, preserve normal nerve function and prevent certain types of anemia. People with kidney disease, those who drink too much alcohol, Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis may have problems with absorbing this vitamin. Physical signs are a rash, dandruff or scaly patches and red skin on face, chest and back. Depression, confusion and even seizures can be present if the deficiency is too bad.

**Good sources:** Fortified cereals and grains, beans, poultry, fish, dark leafy green vegetables, oranges and cantaloupe.
RDA – 1.7 milligrams (mg) for men, 1.5 mg for women.

**Calcium** Helps build and maintain strong bones. Your body will take the calcium from your bones if you don’t get enough, increasing the risk of brittle bones and fractures.

**Good Sources:** Low-fat milk and other dairy products. Kale, broccoli, juices fortified with calcium (and vitamin D). The body needs calcium and protein for bone health—best to use dairy products, not supplements.
**Vitamin D** Helps the body absorb calcium, maintain bone density, and prevent osteoporosis. May also protect against chronic diseases like cancer, type 1 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis. Not getting enough is linked to increased risk of falling, bone fractures.

**Good sources:** Mainly produced by the skin when exposed to sunlight. Many foods are fortified with vitamin D, including cereals, milk, some yogurts, and juices. Few foods naturally contain vitamin D. However, vitamin D is found in salmon, tuna, and eggs. Many experts feel that older people need to take vitamin D supplements, since the skin doesn’t produce as much from sunlight as we age.

RDA: 400 international units (IU) (ages 51-70), 600 IU (over 70 years old). Not to take more than 2000 IU daily.

**Potassium** Helps keep your bones strong, cell function and can help reduce high blood pressure and the risk of kidney stones. Not enough can cause weakness, tiredness, or cramping in arm or leg muscles, tingling or numbness, nausea or vomiting, abdominal cramping, bloating, constipation, feeling your heart beat irregularly.

**Good sources:** Fruits and vegetables, particularly bananas, prunes, plums, oranges, salad greens, and potatoes with their skin, beans, dairy and less processed meats. Be careful with potassium supplements as too much in your blood can lead to dangerous, and possibly deadly, changes in heart rhythm.

RDA: 3500 milligrams (mg).

**Magnesium** Important mineral needed for muscle, nerve, and enzyme function. It helps the body use energy and is needed to move potassium and sodium into and out of cells. Absorption of magnesium decreases with age. Some medications, like diuretics, may reduce absorption. Not getting enough can cause muscle spasms and cramps, anxiety and depression, high blood pressure, sleep problems, and low energy.

**Good sources:** Whole foods, including vegetables (often lost in processing). Select unprocessed foods like fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, beans and seeds.

RDA: 420 milligrams (mg).

**Fiber** Helps promote healthy digestion by moving foods through the digestive tract, helps you feel full, delays absorption of sugar, and protects the heart from disease. If you’re having fewer than three bowel movements a week, and the stools are hard and dry, you’re constipated. Constipation can result from not enough fiber, but also from too little exercise, not enough fluids, and certain medications and supplements.

**Good sources:** Whole grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids to avoid constipation when eating fiber-rich foods.

RDA: 30 grams (gm).
**Omega-3 Fats** Reduces symptoms in rheumatoid arthritis, slows the progression of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a disease of reduced vision, reduces inflammation and may help lower risk of heart disease, cancer, and arthritis. They are very concentrated in the brain and are important for memory, performance and behavior. Not enough may cause fatigue, poor memory, dry skin, heart problems, mood swings or depression, and poor circulation.

**Good sources:** Mediterranean Diet - eating at least two servings of fish a week like salmon, tuna, sardines, and mackerel is beneficial. Soybeans, walnuts, flaxseed, and olive and canola oil. Adequate Intake: (ALA type) for adults over 50 is 1.6 grams for a male and 1.1 grams for a female. Several different omega-3s exist, but the majority of the research focuses on alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

**Antioxidants – Carotenoids** Among the 600 or more carotenoids in foods, beta-carotene, lycopene and lutein are well-known to reduce the damage from free radicals, helping to prevent certain cancers and decrease your risk of macular degeneration. [Free radicals break down the structures of our cells.]

**Good sources:** Red, orange, deep-yellow and some dark-green leafy vegetables like tomatoes, carrots, spinach, Brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, winter squash and broccoli.

**Antioxidants – Vitamin E** Also protects your body from cell damage that can lead to cancer, heart disease and cataracts as we age.

**Good sources:** Vegetable oils, salad dressings, margarine, wheat germ, whole-grain products, seeds, nuts and peanut butter. RDA – 22.4 International Units (IU)

**Antioxidants – Vitamin C** Protects your body from infection and damage to body cells, helping produce collagen (the connective tissue that holds bones and muscles together) and in the absorption of iron and folate.

**Good sources:** Citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruits and tangerines), strawberries, sweet peppers, tomatoes, broccoli and potatoes, melon.

RDA – 90 milligrams (mg)
Water  Your body weight is approximately 60 percent water. It is used in all cells, organs, and tissues to help regulate temperature and maintain other bodily functions. Not enough water and you can become dehydrated. Symptoms include thirst, dry mouth, dark yellow urine, fatigue, and irritability. With age, sense of thirst may decline. Certain medicines increase the risk for becoming dehydrated. Good sources: 8 glasses of fluids a day – water, teas, coffee, limit sugar-sweetened beverages like soda, flavored drinks. Water is especially important if you are increasing the fiber in your diet, since

My Daily Food Plan

Based on the information you provided, this is your daily recommended amount for each food group.

- **Grains**: 6 ounces
- **Vegetables**: 2 1/2 cups
- **Fruits**: 2 cups
- **Dairy**: 3 cups
- **Protein Foods**: 5 1/2 ounces

Make half your grains whole

- Aim for at least 3 ounces of whole grains a day

Vary your veggies

- Aim for these amounts each week:
  - Dark green veggies = 1 1/2 cups
  - Red and orange veggies = 3/4 cup
  - Beans = 1 1/2 cups
  - Other veggies = 3/4 cup

Focus on fruits

- Eat a variety of fruit

Get your calcium-rich foods

- Drink low-fat or non-fat milk, for the same amount of calcium and other nutrients as whole milk, but less fat and Calories
- Select fat-free or low-fat yogurt and cheese, or try calcium fortified soy products

Go lean with protein

- Twice a week, make seafood the protein on your plate
- Vary your protein source—choose beans, peas, nuts, and seeds more often
- Keep meat and poultry portions small and lean

Find your balance between food and physical activity

- Be physically active for at least 150 minutes each week.

Know your limits on fats, sugars, and sodium

- Your allowance for oils is 6 teaspoons a day
- Limit Calories from solid fats and added sugars to 250 Calories a day
- Reduce sodium intake to less than 2300 mg a day

Your results are based on a 2000 Calorie pattern.

Name: ____________________________

Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments. For information, call 382-8481, #9, ext.304

To get assistance concerning depression call 382-8481, #0

Have a nutritional question or concern? If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian. Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 372-1622, ext. 269. Leave a message, if necessary, for dietitian to call you back.

Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services denies no person services or access to service based upon race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status and/or handicapping conditions. Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services is primarily funded with County tax dollars. Supplemental funding is through the New York State Office for the Aging under Title III-B/D, III-C-1, III-C-2, III-F of the Federal Older Americans Act, and New York State Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly (EISEP), Community Services for the Elderly Act (CSE), Congregate Services Initiative (CSI), and the Wellness In Nutrition (WIN).

OFA—Vitamins and Minerals 10/2017