

## Facts about Vitamin A<sup>1</sup>

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### Why do we need Vitamin A?



Vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin that is essential to our health.

It helps us see normally in the dark.

Vitamin A also promotes normal growth and health of body cells and keeps skin healthy.

There are animal sources (retinol) and vegetable sources (carotenoids) of vitamin A in foods. Only a few of the carotenoids in foods are converted to vitamin A in the body. Beta-carotene is the most familiar carotenoid.

Beta-carotene, like several other carotenoids, acts as an antioxidant. Antioxidants help slow or prevent cell damage. By protecting cells from damage, antioxidants may reduce risk for certain cancers and heart disease.

### What happens if we don't get enough vitamin A?



Inadequate intake of vitamin A can cause night blindness, dry, scaly skin, increased risk for infections, and poor growth.

### How much vitamin A do we need?

Recommended intakes for vitamin A are given as "Retinol Activity Equivalents" (RAEs).

Using RAEs helps account for the difference in activity between carotenoids and retinol. It takes about 12 units of beta-carotene or 24 units of other carotenoids to make 1 unit of retinol in the body.

The following table lists the RAEs for vitamin A:

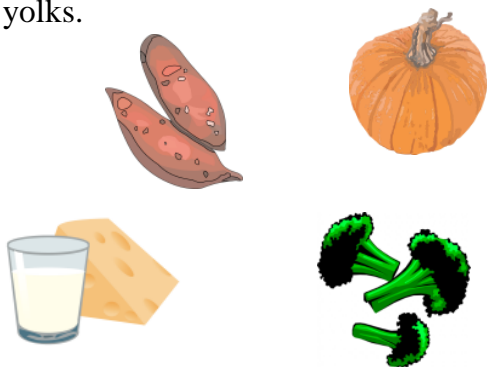
Life Stage	Vitamin A (µg/day as RAE)
Men, ages 19+	900
Women, ages 19+	700
Pregnancy	770*
Breastfeeding	1300
µg= micrograms RAE= Retinol Activity Equivalents	
*Pregnant women should avoid supplemental, preformed vitamin A.	

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## How can we get enough vitamin A?

We get vitamin A by eating a variety of fruits and vegetables that contain carotenoids, and from dairy products fortified with vitamin A. Vitamin A is also found in liver and egg yolks.



Here are some foods and the amount of vitamin A they contain:

Food	Vitamin A (RAE*)
Sweet potato, cooked, 1 medium	1400
Carrot, raw, 1 medium	600
Pumpkin, cooked, ½ cup	305
Cantaloupe, cubed, 1 cup	270
Milk, low fat, with vitamin A, 1 cup	140
Broccoli, pieces, cooked, 1 cup	120
Apricots, 3 medium	105
Egg, cooked, 1 large	85
Cheese, Cheddar, 1 ounce	75
*Retinol Activity Equivalents	

## What about supplements?

We don't need supplements since vitamin A is so widely available in foods and is easily stored in the body. Pregnant women especially should **avoid** taking retinol supplements.

High doses during pregnancy can cause birth defects. Look for beta-carotene as the only vitamin A source in prenatal supplements.



## How much is too much?

Taking large doses of retinol can cause nausea, vomiting, headache, and dry scaly skin. More severe health problems from storing excess vitamin A in the body are liver damage, osteoporosis, and nervous system disorders. Vitamin A toxicity can kill you!

**Keep your total vitamin A intake less than 3,000 µg per day from retinol.**

## Where can I get more information?

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent in your county Extension office may have more written information and nutrition classes for you to attend. Also, a registered dietitian (RD) can provide reliable information to you.

Reliable nutrition information may be found on the Internet at the following sites:

<http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>

<http://nutrition.gov>

<http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/vitamina.asp>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus>

