

Facts about Vitamin C¹

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Why do we need vitamin C?

Vitamin C, also known as ascorbic acid, has a wide variety of uses in the body. It helps slow down or prevent cell damage. It is needed to maintain healthy body tissues and the immune system. Vitamin C also helps our bodies absorb iron from plant foods.

What happens if we don't get enough vitamin C?

Vitamin C is found in many foods we eat and deficiency is rare. Scurvy, the disease caused by vitamin C deficiency, was common generations ago. Seamen who lived at sea for months at a time and ate no fresh fruits or vegetables often got scurvy. Today, scurvy is rare in the U.S. Still, not getting enough vitamin C can lead to anemia, bleeding gums, infections, dry and splitting hair, and poor wound healing.

How much vitamin C do we need?



The following table lists recommended daily intakes of vitamin C. People who smoke need an additional 35 milligrams of vitamin C every day.

Table 1: Recommended Daily Intakes of Vitamin C

Life Stage	Amount (mg/day)
Men, ages 19+	90
Women, ages 19+	75
Pregnancy	
Ages 18 and younger	80
Ages 19 and older	85
Breastfeeding	
Ages 18 and younger	115
Ages 19 and older	120
mg = milligrams of vitamin C	

How can we get enough vitamin C?



The best way to get enough vitamin C is through foods rather than supplements. Fruits and vegetables are the best sources. Rich sources of this vitamin include citrus fruits and citrus fruit juices, sweet peppers, papayas, and strawberries.

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Table 2: Food Sources of Vitamin C.

Food	Vitamin C (mg/serving)
Papaya, 1 medium	300
Potato, baked, 1 medium	200
Strawberries, halved, 1 cup	165
Cantaloupe, ¼ medium melon	140
Orange, 1 medium	130
Red or yellow sweet pepper, raw, medium	120
Broccoli, cooked, ½ cup	90
Cabbage, raw ½ cup	35
mg = milligrams of vitamin C	

What about fortified foods?

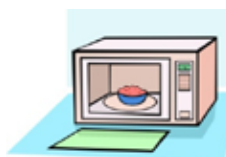
Some juices and cereals have vitamin C added. The amount of vitamin C in each product varies. Check the nutrition label to see how much vitamin C the product contributes to your daily need.



How should foods be prepared to retain vitamin C?

Vitamin C is easily destroyed during preparation, cooking, or storage. To retain vitamin C in foods, follow these tips:

- Ä Eat raw fruits and vegetables as soon as possible after buying them.
- Ä Cut vegetables just before eating or cooking.
- Ä Cook vitamin C-rich foods quickly in as little water as possible.



Ä Microwave, steam, or stir-fry vegetables to retain the most vitamin C; do not overcook.

What about supplements?

Healthy individuals who eat plenty of fruits and vegetables rarely need vitamin C supplements. Contrary to popular opinion, taking vitamin C supplements does not prevent colds. However, some studies show that vitamin C supplements may decrease the duration of a cold.

How much is too much?

If you do take a supplement, **do not get more than 2000 mg/day of vitamin C from foods and supplements.** Although excess vitamin C is mostly eliminated in the urine, high doses can cause headaches, frequent urination, diarrhea, and nausea. People with a history of kidney stones should avoid high levels of vitamin C.

Where can I get more information?

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your county Extension office may have more written information and nutrition classes for you to attend. In Florida, you can find your local Extension office at <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map>. 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://www.nutrition.gov>
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/vitamins.html>

