

Facts about Vitamin A¹

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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:

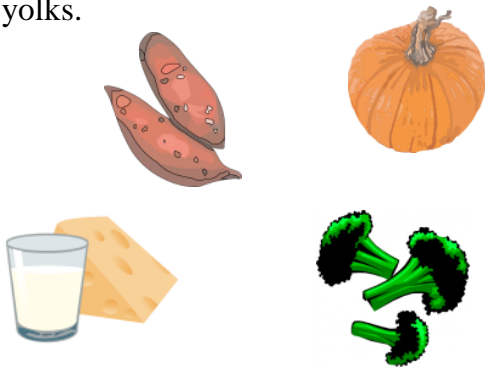
Life Stage	Vitamin A (µg/day as RAE)
Men, ages 19+	900
Women, ages 19+	700
Pregnancy	770*
Breastfeeding	1300
µg= micrograms RAE= Retinol Activity Equivalents	
*Pregnant women should avoid supplemental, preformed vitamin A.	

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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>

