

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

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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 also is needed to maintain healthy body tissues and the immune system. Vitamin C helps the body 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 a few generations ago. It was prevalent among seamen who lived on dried and salted foods for months at a time. Scurvy is rare in the U.S. Still, not getting enough vitamin C can lead to anemia, bleeding gums, infections, 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 mg of vitamin C every day.



The following table lists recommended daily intakes of vitamin C:

Life Stage	Vitamin C (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.



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

Food	Vitamin C (mg/serving)
Red or yellow sweet pepper, raw, medium	225
Papaya, 1 medium	190
Strawberries, halved, 1 cup	90
Orange, 1 medium	80
Cantaloupe, ¼ medium melon	50
Potato, baked, 1 medium	20
mg = milligrams oz = ounces	

### 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, follow these tips:

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

- Microwave, steam, or stir-fry to retain the most vitamin C.



### What about supplements?

Healthy individuals who eat plenty of fruits and vegetables rarely need vitamin C supplements. Taking vitamin C supplements does not prevent colds. 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. 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://fyics.ifas.ufl.edu>

<http://www.eatright.org>

<http://www.nutrition.gov>

