

Facts about Copper¹

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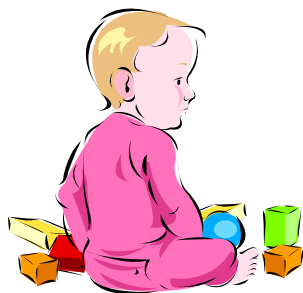
Why do we need copper?

Copper is one of the trace minerals we need in our diet. It helps keep the body tissues healthy and is needed for proper use of iron in the body. Copper also is involved in antioxidant function. This trace mineral helps keep the immune system, nervous system, and heart healthy.



What happens if we don't get enough copper?

Copper deficiency is rare, but can occur in some conditions. Copper deficiency has been seen in pre-term infants who were fed milk formulas. Copper deficiency also can occur in people fed only through their veins for a long time (total parenteral nutrition).



Copper deficiency causes anemia, low white blood cell counts, and low bone density. Low intake during pregnancy may cause birth defects. High intake of iron or zinc can decrease copper absorption and cause a deficiency. It is best to get these minerals from foods we eat rather than supplements.

How much copper do we need?

The following table lists recommended daily intakes of copper. There is no difference in the amount needed by men and women, except when a woman is pregnant or breast-feeding.

Life Stage	Copper (mcg/day)
Men, ages 19+	900
Women, ages, 19+	900
Pregnancy	1000
Breastfeeding	1300
mcg = micrograms	

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How can we get enough copper?

Shellfish and organ meats like liver are excellent sources of copper. Nuts and seeds, mushrooms, whole grain cereals, and legumes contain some copper.



Here are some foods and the amount of copper they contain:

Food	Copper (mcg/serving)
Beef Liver, cooked, 3 ounces	3830
Oysters, cooked, 3 ounces	640
Baked beans, vegetarian, canned, 1 cup	520
Sunflower seeds, oil roasted 1 ounce	510
Refried beans, canned, 1 cup	420
Mushrooms, cooked, ½ cup	390
Peanuts, oil roasted, 1 ounce	360
Soy milk, 1 cup	350
Pecans, oil roasted, 1 ounce	340
Tofu, firm, ½ cup	300
100% Bran Cereal, 1 ounce	270
Sweet potato, baked, medium	240
Casava, raw, 1 cup	210
Baked potato, 1 medium	200
Beef chuck roast, 3 ounces	140
Ground beef, broiled patty, 3 ounces	70
mcg = micrograms	

Breastfed infants get more copper than those fed formula.

What about supplements?

Most Americans get all the copper they need from the foods they eat. Supplements are not generally needed. Taking a multivitamin or mineral supplement with no more than the recommended daily intake is fine.

How much is too much?

Copper toxicity is rare in healthy people. However, very high intakes over time can cause liver damage. **Keep your total copper intake less than 10,000 mcg (10 mg) per day from food and supplements combined.**

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://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic>
<http://www.nutrition.gov>
<http://www.mayohealth.org>

