

Facts About Magnesium¹

Linda B. Bobroff and Jennifer Hillan²

Why do we need magnesium?

Magnesium is a mineral needed by every cell in the body. More than 300 chemical reactions in the body require magnesium. Magnesium helps to:

- support normal muscle and nerve function;
- keep a steady heartbeat;
- keep bones strong;
- make protein and DNA; and
- use energy from the foods we eat.

What happens if we don't get enough magnesium?

Many Americans don't get enough magnesium in their diets. But most healthy people **do not** have signs of deficiency even if their intake is low because the body stores this mineral. However, people who abuse alcohol, take certain diuretic drugs, or have kidney disease may be at risk for magnesium deficiency. Long-lasting diarrhea or vomiting also can cause a deficiency. Older adults often do not get enough magnesium in their diets.

The following conditions can be signs of magnesium deficiency or other medical problems. Check with your doctor if you have:

- loss of appetite;
- confusion;

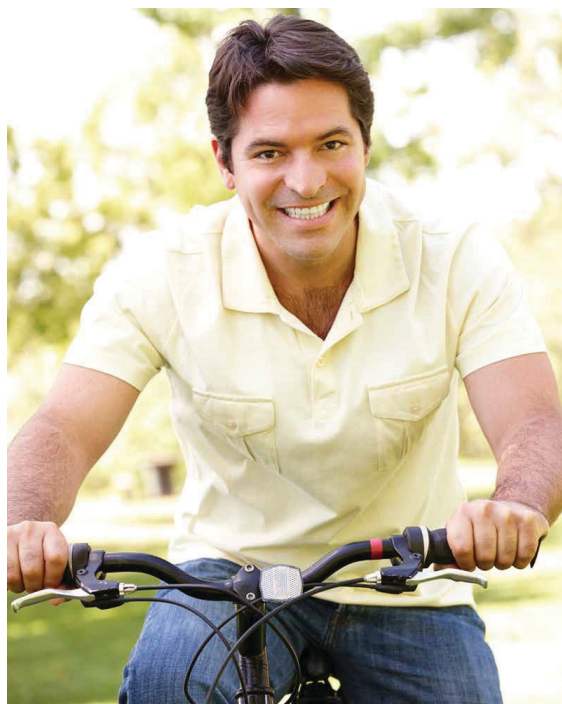


Figure 1. Every cell in your body needs magnesium, so it is important to get enough in your diet.

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- abnormal heartbeat;
- muscle cramps;
- high blood pressure; or
- seizures.

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2. Linda B. Bobroff, PhD, RD, LD/N, professor emeritus, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; and Jennifer Hillan, MSH, RD, LD/N, former ENAFS nutrition educator; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Table 1. Recommended daily intakes of magnesium.

Life Stage	Amount (mg/day)
Men, ages 19–30	400
Men, ages 31+	420
Women, ages 19–30	310
Women, ages 31+	320
Pregnancy, ages 19–30	350
Pregnancy, ages 31+	360
Breastfeeding, ages 19–30	310
Breastfeeding, ages 31+	320
mg = milligrams of magnesium	

How can we get enough magnesium?

The best sources of magnesium are nuts, legumes, seeds, dark green vegetables, seafood, and whole grains. We can get enough magnesium by eating a variety of these foods every day. Some sources of “hard” water add magnesium to the diet.

Table 2. Food sources of magnesium.

Food	Magnesium* (mg/serving)
Sesame seeds, toasted, 1 ounce	100
Almonds, roasted, 1 ounce	80
Avocado, Florida, 1 medium	75
Spinach, cooked, ½ cup	75
Wheat germ, ¼ cup	70
Oatmeal, cooked, 1 cup	65
100% bran flakes cereal, ¾ cup	65
Black beans, cooked, ½ cup	60
Potato, baked, with skin, 1 medium	50
Peanuts, dry roasted, 1 ounce	50
Whole-wheat bread, 2 slices	45
Figs, dried, 5	30
Banana, medium	30
Halibut, cooked, 3 ounces	25
mg = milligrams of magnesium	
*USDA, Agricultural Research Service, National Research Library, https://fdc.nal.usda.gov	

What about supplements?

People who eat a variety of healthy foods generally don't need magnesium supplements. However, people who have certain diseases or take certain medications may need extra magnesium. Your health care provider can tell you if you need to take a magnesium supplement.



Figure 2. Nuts such as almonds and cashews are good sources of magnesium.

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How much is too much?

Magnesium is found in some over-the-counter drugs, including “milk of magnesia” and some antacids. Large doses of these products or magnesium supplements can cause nausea, diarrhea, and stomach cramps. Magnesium from foods does not cause these symptoms. **You should not get more than 350 mg of magnesium per day from supplements or drugs.**

Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your local UF/IFAS Extension office may have more information or nutrition classes for you to attend (find your local UF/IFAS Extension office at <http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>). Also, a registered dietitian (RD) can provide reliable information.

The following websites also have reliable information:

- Nutrition.gov—<http://www.nutrition.gov>
- National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements—<http://ods.od.nih.gov/>
- Medline Plus—<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/minerals.html>