

# Here's why you need vitamin B12, and where you can find it

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## **Five Reasons You Need More B12**

Prevention magazine

What happens if you don't get enough vitamin B12?

"Vitamin B12 deficiency causes tiredness, weakness, constipation, loss of appetite, weight loss, and megaloblastic anemia," the [National Institutes of Health](#) says. "Nerve problems, such as numbness and tingling in the hands and feet, can also occur. Other symptoms of vitamin B12 deficiency include problems with balance, depression, confusion, dementia, poor memory, and soreness of the mouth or tongue." [A paper published this summer](#) theorized that Mary Todd Lincoln's well-known psychological and emotional problems were caused by a shortage of the vitamin.

Okay, so you see it's important. About 15 percent of Americans don't get enough of it — and "a B12 deficiency can go undiagnosed for years," J.J. Virgin writes in Prevention magazine. Symptoms such as fatigue, shortness of breath and forgetfulness might point to such a deficiency and should not be ignored.

Certain people are more likely to be deficient in B12, Virgin writes:

- Vegetarians and vegans. B12 is found naturally only in animal products (most notably beef liver and clams,NIH notes). "In fact, that's a big part of how the 'pale, weak vegan' stereotype came to be: chronic B12 deficiency causes pale skin and weakness," Virgin writes.
- People older than 50. You are more likely to have a deficiency as you age — and symptoms such as memory loss are easier to overlook when everybody attributes them to "senior moments."
- People who drink alcohol regularly. The problem is, B12 is stored in your liver, and that is stressed by too much alcohol.

- People with acid reflux. As if heartburn weren't bad enough, both stomach problems *and* the medications used to treat them prevent your body from absorbing B12.

- People with diabetes or an autoimmune disease. Again, these conditions prevent your body from absorbing the vitamin.

Fortunately, as Virgin notes, B12 supplements are easily available, by shots, lozenges and additives in food. Fortified breakfast cereals, in particular, are a good source readily available to vegetarians and vegans. And you don't have to worry about overdoing it, because B12 is water-soluble — so your body takes what it needs and flushes out the rest.

— Nancy Szokan

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