

Facts about Niacin¹

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Why do we need niacin?

Niacin is one of the B vitamins. Sometimes it is called vitamin B₃. We need niacin for our bodies to use the energy in carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. Niacin also is needed for DNA repair and for the normal use of calcium in the body.



What happens if we don't get enough niacin?

The disease *pellagra* results from niacin deficiency. Pellagra was common in the 1800s when many poor Americans ate mostly corn, molasses, and salt pork. Because niacin is found in many foods that we eat today, most people get plenty in their diets, and pellagra is now a thing of the past.

Pellagra could be called the “D” disease. It leads to **diarrhea**, **dementia** (memory disorder), **dermatitis** (skin rash), and **death**.

How much niacin do we need?

The following table lists recommended daily intakes of niacin:

Life Stage	Niacin (mg/day)
Men, ages 19+	16
Women, ages 19+	14
Pregnancy	18
Breastfeeding	17
mg = milligrams	

How can we get enough niacin?

Niacin is found in whole grain foods such as brown rice and whole wheat bread. Niacin is one of four vitamins added to enriched grain products such as enriched flour. Look for the word “niacin” in the ingredient list to see if it has been added.



INGREDIENTS: Enriched semolina (iron, thiamin mononitrate, folic acid, riboflavin, **niacin**), tomato, beet and spinach powders, ...

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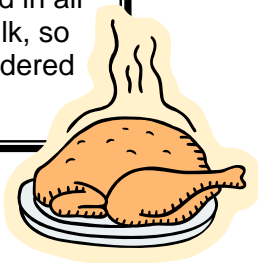
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Other good sources of niacin are peanuts, mushrooms, and seafood. Here are some foods and the amount of niacin they contain:

Food	Niacin (mg per serving)
Salmon, cooked, 3 oz	7
Turkey, light meat, cooked, 3 oz	6
Ready-to-eat cereal, 1 cup	5
Beef, lean ground, cooked, 3 oz	5
Peanut butter, 2 Tbsp	4
Mushrooms, cooked, ½ cup	3
Spaghetti, enriched, cooked, 1 cup	2
mg = milligrams oz = ounces Tbsp = tablespoons	

Did you know that.....?

Tryptophan, one of the amino acids that makes up protein, can be converted to niacin in the body. Tryptophan is found in all types of meats, and in milk, so these foods can be considered sources of niacin!



How should foods be prepared to retain niacin?

Because niacin is a water-soluble vitamin, it can be lost when foods are cooked in a lot of water. However, most good sources of niacin are not typically cooked in water. Cooking doesn't affect tryptophan content.

What about supplements?

Most people get plenty of niacin in their diet, so supplements usually are not needed. Most multivitamin supplements contain niacin. There is no need to take a supplement with more than 100 to 150% of the Daily Value for niacin.



How much is too much?

Very high doses of niacin (1,300 to 3,000 mg per day) have been used to treat high blood cholesterol levels. However, there can be side effects such as flushing of the skin, itching, nausea, and even liver damage. The suggested *maximum* niacin intake from supplements is 35 mg a day. **Do not take large amounts of niacin unless prescribed by your doctor!** Let your doctor know if you have side effects from taking niacin supplements.

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>

