

## Facts about Zinc<sup>1</sup>

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### Why do we need zinc?

Zinc is a mineral that is found in almost every cell in our bodies. It's needed for hundreds of chemical reactions. Zinc helps with:

- Keeping our immune system healthy
- Normal use of vitamin A
- Normal cell replacement

Zinc is needed for normal growth and development. It's critical for pregnant women and children to get enough zinc in their diets.



### What happens if we don't get enough zinc?

Zinc deficiency can affect the immune system and reduce growth in children. Severe zinc deficiency also can cause diarrhea, hair loss, poor appetite, skin disorders, and changes in taste. People who drink alcohol in excess are at high risk for zinc deficiency (and other health problems).

### How much zinc do we need?

The following table lists recommended daily intakes of zinc:

Life Stage	Amount (mg/day)
Men, ages 19+	11
Women, ages 19+	8
Pregnancy*	11
Breastfeeding**	12
*Pregnant teens need 12 mg ** Breastfeeding teens need 13 mg mg = milligrams of zinc	

### How can we get enough zinc?

The best food sources of zinc are seafood, meat, poultry, beans, nuts and some fortified cereals. The zinc found in animal foods is easily absorbed by the body. Whole grains also contain zinc, but it is not well absorbed.



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

FOOD	ZINC (mg/serving)
Oysters, cooked, 3 oz	75
Crab meat, cooked, 3 oz	7
Beef chuck, lean, cooked, 3 oz	7
Fortified cereals, 1 cup	3 to 4
Chicken leg, cooked, 3 oz	3
Baked beans, canned, ½ cup	2
Milk, 1 cup	1
mg = milligrams oz = ounces	

### What about supplements?

Multivitamin supplements with minerals usually contain zinc. These supplements can be used by people who may not get enough zinc in their diets. People 51 years of age and older, pregnant women, and nursing moms may benefit from taking a zinc supplement.



Some studies (but not all) have found that zinc lozenges decrease the duration of colds. This is an area that needs more research.



### How much is too much?

High intakes of zinc can be toxic. Large amounts of zinc also can interfere with the absorption of other minerals. **You should not get more than 40 mg of zinc a day, from food and supplements together.**

### Where can I get more information?

The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent at your local Extension office may have written information and nutrition classes for you to attend. Also, your doctor or a registered dietitian (RD) can provide you with reliable information.

Reliable nutrition information may be found on the Internet at the following sites:

<http://fyics.ifas.ufl.edu>  
<http://www.nutrition.gov>

