Facts About Zinc¹

Linda B. Bobroff²

Why Do We Need Zinc?

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

- Keeping our immune system healthy
- Protein synthesis
- Normal cell replacement
- Wound healing

Zinc is needed for optimal growth and development. It is critical for pregnant women and children to have enough zinc in their diets.

Figure 1. Zinc is critical for children's proper growth and development

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What Happens If We Don't Have Enough Zinc in Our Diets?

Zinc deficiency can affect the immune system, cognitive function, and growth in children. Severe zinc deficiency can cause diarrhea, hair loss, poor appetite, skin disorders, impotence, 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?

Table 1. 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, and poultry. Beans, nuts, some fortified cereals, and dairy products also provide zinc. The zinc found in animal foods is easily absorbed by the body. Whole grains naturally contain zinc, but it is not absorbed well.

1. This document is FCS8705, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension. First published: June 2001. Latest revision: July 2013. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Linda B. Bobroff, PhD, RD, LD/N, professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Table 2. Food sources of zinc

Food	Zinc (mg/serving)
Oysters, cooked, 3 oz	75
Crab meat, cooked, 3 oz	7
Beef chuck, lean, cooked, 3 oz	7
Hamburger (fast food), 3 oz	5
Fortified cereals, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup	3–4
Baked beans, canned, vegetarian, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	3
Chicken leg, cooked, 3 oz	2.5
Almonds or peanuts, 1 oz	1
Low-fat milk, 1 cup	1
mg = milligrams oz = ounces

Figure 2. Hamburger and other beef products provide zinc in an easily absorbable form.

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What About Supplements?

Multivitamin supplements with minerals usually contain zinc. These supplements can be used by people who may not have enough zinc in their diets. Vegetarians, pregnant women, and nursing moms may benefit from taking a supplement containing zinc.

Many people believe that taking zinc lozenges decreases the duration of colds. Some studies have found that zinc lozenges decrease the duration and/or severity of a cold when they are taken within one day of the onset of cold symptoms. This area needs more research before exact recommendations can be made on the most effective dosage and formulation.

How Much Is Too Much?

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

Where Can I Find More Information?

The 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 office at <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map/>). Also, your doctor or a registered dietitian (RD) can provide reliable information.

The following websites also have reliable information:

- UF/IFAS Extension - <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>
- Nutrition.gov - <http://www.nutrition.gov>
- National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements - http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Zinc_pf.asp