

Vitamin C

Nutrient of the Month

During the 16th century, after spending months away at sea, British sailors developed bleeding gums, loose teeth, muscle weakness and eventually death due to a disease called scurvy. Scurvy, probably the first disease to be definitely associated with a dietary deficiency, develops due to a lack of vitamin C in the diet. Since the early 1900s, it has been relatively rare but as recently as the summer of 2000, doctors were stunned by a report of a five year-old boy who developed scurvy from eating a diet of cheese pizza, toaster pastries, biscuits and water for five months. He refused fruits, vegetables and multivitamins. While cases of scurvy are rare today, some health experts believe that many Americans may be marginally deficient in vitamin C.



Role in the Body: Vitamin C plays an integral role in many body processes. It is necessary to form white blood cells needed to fight infections, including the common cold (it cannot, however, prevent the common cold). As an antioxidant, it works by neutralizing the destructive compounds in the body known as free radicals. It helps build collagen, a structural protein that holds cells, bones and tissues together. Vitamin C plays a role in skin and cartilage formation, wound healing and aids in the absorption of iron.

Research Highlights: Vitamin C has been linked to

- Lower risk of cancers of the gastrointestinal tract, lung and cervix
- A reduction in gallbladder disease among postmenopausal women
- Protection against heart disease and stroke
- Slowing the progression of age-related macular degeneration, a condition that can lead to vision loss
- Lower risk of cataracts
- Protecting the lungs against damaging oxidants in the air

How Much is Enough? Since humans cannot manufacture or store vitamin C, it must be obtained in the diet every day. The Daily Value for vitamin C is 60 milligrams a day. While this amount is adequate to prevent scurvy, nutrition experts argue that it may not be enough for optimal health. A National Institutes of Health study recommends 200 milligrams of vitamin C daily. The maximum safe dose is set at 2,000 milligrams a day.



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Do You Know Where the “C” Is? It’s possible to get 200 milligrams of vitamin C if you eat the recommended five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables daily, especially if one of the servings is citrus.

Food	Vitamin C (milligrams)
Sweet red pepper, raw, ½ cup	141
Apricot nectar, canned, 8 fl oz	136
Orange juice, fresh-squeezed, 6 fl oz	93
Strawberries, fresh, 1 cup	84
Orange, 1 medium	75
Orange juice, from concentrate, 6 fl oz	73
Kiwifruit, 1 medium	71
Grapefruit juice, from concentrate, 6 fl oz	63
Cantaloupe, 1 cup cubes	59
Vegetable juice cocktail, 6 fl oz	50
Broccoli, cooked, ½ cup	50
Brussels sprouts, cooked, ½ cup	49
Raspberries, fresh, 1 cup	41
Grapefruit, ½ medium	40
Pineapple, ½ cup tidbits	28
Cauliflower, cooked, ½ cup	28
Tangerine, 1 medium	26
Potato, baked with skin, 1 medium	19
Tomato, raw, 1 medium	16

fl oz = fluid ounces

Source: USDA Database, Release 16, 2003.

Did you Know?

- Not only are oranges an excellent source of vitamin C, researchers have discovered that oranges contain more than 60 phytonutrients.
- The skin and flesh of citrus fruits contain flavonoids, limonoids and cryptoxanthin, linked to lung health and zeaxanthin, linked to and eye health.
- The pectin in oranges and other citrus fruits is a source of cholesterol lowering soluble fiber – a good reason to eat whole citrus fruits over juice.
- Two medium kiwifruit contain twice the vitamin C of an orange.

Ways to Get More Vitamin C Throughout the Day

- Steam or microwave vegetables with a minimum of water to preserve this fragile, water-soluble vitamin.
- Add fresh or canned citrus segments to fruit salads, mixed greens and vegetable salads.
- Make citrus spritzers by adding freshly squeezed orange, lime or lemon juice to club soda or seltzer.
- Bring or purchase a citrus fruit or small can of tomato juice or V8 juice to work or school.
- Choose baked potatoes over processed potatoes.
- Add shredded red or green cabbage to mixed green salads.

