

B Vitamins- the benefits

B vitamins are the one of the popular vitamins sold over the counter in pharmacies. Whelehans Traditional Tonic contains B vitamins and I often get asked the benefits of B vitamins. So in this article, I describe the different B vitamins, the best food sources and benefits of each one.

The “energy” vitamins

The B vitamins are often referred to as the “energy” vitamins, mainly because they are involved in energy release in the body. There are in fact eight different B vitamins, each with a different role in the body. The eight B vitamins are Vitamin B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, B7, B9 and B12.

Types of B vitamins

Vitamin B1 is also called thiamine. It helps to regulate mental functions and nerve growth and can also help with memory. It also helps convert food to energy. Thiamine can be found in whole grains, beans, oranges, peas, peanut butter, pork, liver and fish. A deficiency of vitamin B1 is common among people who abuse alcohol and alcoholics therefore need more thiamine. Alcohol reduces the absorption of thiamine in the body so vitamin B1 supplements are often needed by diabetics. Heavy smokers or people who consume too many carbohydrates have a greater need for vitamin B1. Stress related conditions will also deplete vitamin B reserves within the body including vitamin B1. The recommended daily allowance of vitamin B1 is 1.4mg.

Vitamin B2 is also called riboflavin. It releases energy from foods, makes many of the body’s hormones and helps growth and development. It can be found in dairy products, green leafy vegetables, avocados, meat, beans and nuts. A shortage of this vitamin may cause cracks and sores at the corners of the mouth, eye disorders, inflammation of the mouth and tongue, and skin lesions. The recommended daily allowance of vitamin B 2 is 1.2mg.

Vitamin B3 is also called niacin and is used for over 50 body processes including releasing energy from food, making hormones, removing toxins and helping to keep cholesterol within the normal range. Niacin can be found in dairy products, meat, chicken, fish, beans, peas, nuts and peanut butter. Vitamin B3 deficiency is rare in Ireland, with alcoholism being the most common cause. The recommended daily allowance of vitamin B3 is 18mg.

Vitamin B5 is also called pantothenic acid. It releases energy from food. It works with other B vitamins to help break down proteins, fats and carbohydrates from food to give the body energy. It is also needed to make vitamin D and red blood cells. It can be found in liver, fish, chicken, beans and whole grains. Deficiency of vitamin B5 can cause fatigue, headaches, nausea, tingling in the hands, depression, personality changes and cardiac instability have been reported. The recommended daily allowance of vitamin B5 is 6mg.

Vitamin B6 is also known as pyridoxine. It can help prevent heart disease and reduce depression. We get Pyridoxine by eating fish, chicken, potatoes, bananas, peas, beans, and avocados. Signs of vitamin B6 deficiency include dermatitis (skin inflammation), glossitis (a sore tongue), depression, confusion, and convulsions. The recommended daily allowance of vitamin B6 is 2mg. Deficiency in Ireland is rare, and only occurs in people with extremely poor diets.

Vitamin B7 is also called biotin. It helps to break down the proteins, carbohydrates and fats into energy. We get Biotin by eating liver, salmon, clams, eggs, milk, peanut butter and bananas. Long-term antibiotic use can interfere with biotin production in the intestine and increase the risk of deficiency symptoms, such as dermatitis, depression, hair loss, anemia, and nausea. Long-term use of anti epilepsy medications may also lead to biotin deficiency. The recommended daily allowance of vitamin B7 is 300mcg.

Vitamin B9 is more commonly called folic acid and helps cells grow and divide properly, prevents birth defects and prevents heart disease. We get folic acid by eating dark green leafy veggies, avocados, beets, orange juice, beans and liver. Women planning to conceive should take folic acid 400mcg daily prior to conception and for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. This prevents spina bifida in the new born child. Clonfolic® is a popular brand of folic acid available over the counter in pharmacies for pregnant women. The normal recommended daily allowance of folic acid for all other adults is 100mcg.

Vitamin B12 is also called cobalamin. It breaks down proteins, carbohydrates and fats to give energy. Vitamin B12, like the other B vitamins, is important for metabolism. It helps in the formation of red blood cells and in the maintenance of the central nervous system. It also helps prevent heart disease and combats depression. You can get cobalamin by eating eggs, milk, yogurt, chicken, fish and meat. Because vitamin B12 comes primarily from animal products, people who follow a strict vegetarian or vegan diet and do not consume eggs or dairy products may require vitamin B12 supplements. Those who had surgery on specific parts of the small intestine or stomach are also prone to a deficiency if they do not take B12 supplements. Low levels of B12 can cause anemia, numbness or tingling in the arms and legs, weakness, and loss of balance. The recommended daily allowance of vitamin B12 is 6mcg. For people who are deficient in vitamin B12, their GP may decide to prescribe vitamin B12 injections. If this is the case, a 1000mcg cobalamin injection is given once monthly via an intra intramuscular injection.

B vitamins fight depression, aging and boosting your immune system

Several studies have shown that the majority of patients admitted into the hospital for depression have a deficiency in the B vitamins pyridoxine and cobalamin. Taking a multivitamin or a B-vitamin complex may help with depression. Do not take more than 2000 mg a day of pyridoxine, unless prescribed by a doctor. Taking more than 2000 mg a day for a long period of time may cause permanent nerve damage. Taking extra pyridoxine and cobalamin not only help depression but also fight aging and help to boost the immune system. Folic acid also helps the lungs, skin, and intestines stay strong against infection. Taking high doses of pyridoxine, cobalamin and folic acid will also give protection from heart disease.

In summary

Getting enough B vitamins will keep energy levels up, provide mental alertness, improve memory, combat aging, boost the immune system and fight against depression. Many elderly, vegetarians or people who are on strict diets often don't get enough of these important vitamins. Also people who are stressed out, eat out often, don't have a good balanced diet with plenty of fruit and veg, or abuse alcohol could also be deficient.

New research on B Vitamins and memory

Researchers at Oxford University recently found that the mild memory problems suffered by healthy people stopped getting worse when they took a B supplement. The people in the Oxford University trial were taking a single pill containing three types of vitamin B (folic acid and vitamin B6 and B12) all in doses far in excess of the recommended daily allowance (RDA). However, further research is needed before we can say for certainty if vitamin B supplements can help with memory and Alzheimer's disease.

Whelehans Tonic

For people lacking in Vitamin B, Whelehans Traditional Tonic is a good choice to get a natural boost. Whelehans traditional Tonic contains Vitamin B1, B2, B3 and B12. I go into more detail above, but the following summarises the benefits of our Tonic's ingredients. Vitamin B1 (thiamine) helps to regulate mental functions and nerve growth and can also help with memory. Each 5ml spoonful of Whelehans Tonic contains 2mg of vitamin B1. Vitamin B2 (riboflavin) releases energy from foods, makes many of the body's hormones and helps growth and development. Each 5ml spoonful of Whelehans Tonic contains 0.5mg of vitamin B2. Vitamin B3 (nicotinamide) is used for over 50 body processes including releasing energy from food, making hormones, removing toxins and helping to keep cholesterol within the normal range. Each 5ml spoonful of Whelehans Tonic contains 5mg of vitamin B3. Vitamin B12 (cobalamin) breaks down the proteins, carbohydrates and fats consumed to release energy. It also helps prevent heart disease and combats depression. Each 5ml spoonful of Whelehans Tonic contains 2.5mg of vitamin B12. Whelehans Traditional Tonic also contains iron. Iron can relieve fatigue, it improves the body's immunity and it encourages restful sleep and prevents insomnia. There is evidence that iron can ease the pain of menstruation. Women with heavy periods can also be low in iron. It improves concentration in children. The recommended adult dose of Whelehans Traditional Tonic (two 5ml spoonfuls twice daily) contains 100% of the daily recommended dose of iron. It is important not to exceed the recommended dosage as excess iron can cause health problems including constipation, nausea and diarrhoea. Anybody suffering from haemochromatosis, a condition characterised by an overload of iron, should avoid iron supplements. Haemochromatosis is an inherited disease and Ireland has one of the highest incidences of it in the world, with about 1% of the population suffering from it.

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans, dial 04493 34591 or log on to www.whelehans.ie. You can also e-mail queries to info@whelehans.ie