



B₁₂ for vegetarians

Strict vegetarians could be putting themselves at risk of a type of anaemia as well as irreversible nerve damage if they don't include a regular supply of vitamin B₁₂, available in eggs, dairy products, fortified foods and supplements.

Vitamin B₁₂ helps our body's red blood cells mature normally and build DNA, our genetic material. Although the daily requirement is minute—less than the size of the full stop at the end of this sentence—this vitamin is essential for the brain, spinal chord and proper nerve function.

Why vegetarians are at risk

Most people get their B₁₂ from foods of animal origin. It is made by micro-organisms and incorporated into the flesh of animals and their products, such as meat, dairy products, seafood and eggs.

However, vegetarians who eliminate or restrict the intake of animal products are at risk of a B₁₂ deficiency, since plant foods do not naturally contain this vitamin, unless it is added during food processing or present if the food is not washed thoroughly and still has soil clinging to it!

Reliable sources of B₁₂

Vegetarians need to include reliable sources in their daily diet:

- milk, cheese and yoghurt
- eggs
- fortified soy or rice drink, eg two cups of So Good™ provides the daily requirement for an adult
- fortified soy burgers/sausages/ luncheon slices, eg Soy Healthy™ range of products
- Marmite™
- daily low-dose supplement (providing 2 mcg cyanocobalamin)—particularly helpful if you travel or don't include fortified foods regularly (breastfeeding women need more).

Check food labels, as not all commercially available vegetarian products are fortified. And note, mushrooms, tempeh, miso, seaweed, spirulina and sauerkraut are not reliable sources of the active form of vitamin B₁₂ required for humans.

See page 31 for a B₁₂-boosting recipe.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For further information on healthy eating, please contact *Sanitarium Nutrition Service*

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