

## Vitamin B12 in Your Diet

As an essential B vitamin, vitamin B12 should be of special interest to vegetarians, not only because it is a compound the body needs, but because it is not found in any significant amounts in plant foods. As a matter of fact, the only foods substantially high in vitamin B12 looks to be mollusks and clams, red meat, some species of fish, eggs, and the like.

A deficiency in vitamin B12 can contribute to several conditions ranging from minor to serious because lack of vitamin B12 causes detrimental changes in certain body functions. Perhaps the primary advantage of vitamin B12 lies in the metabolism of fat and carbohydrates, although the vitamin also plays a significant role in the metabolism of red blood cells.

Vitamin B12 also helps by promoting the maintenance of the myelin sheath surrounding the nerve cells to protect them from damage. Therefore, vitamin B12 deficiency often leads to asthma, anemia, and neurological disorders, such as senile dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

How can you avoid a vitamin B12 deficiency?

The most apparent solution to preventing vitamin B12 deficiency is to eat food rich in vitamin B12. Countless reports from around the world demonstrate that many long-term vegetarians (vegetarians who do not use any eggs, meat, fish, poultry, or dairy products) are especially vulnerable to vitamin B12 deficiency. Since they cannot eat the regular food high in vitamin B12 that other people eat, they often rely on supplements.

In addition to a lack of adequate consumption of food high in vitamin B12, another factor that may lead to a deficiency in this vitamin is a lack of adequate absorption. In spite of the fact that the body does not need to consume a lot of food high in vitamin B12, the vitamin is actually difficult to absorb. Due to this difficulty in absorption, even with a diet of food high in vitamin B12, people may still suffer from vitamin B12 deficiency.

Poor absorption of the vitamins found in food high in vitamin B12 can be attributed to an underlying conditions, including a lack of B12 in diet because of a lack of intrinsic factor secretion due to aging, poor food selections, gastritis, the partial removal of the stomach by surgery (gastrectomy), lack of hydrochloric acid in the stomach, especially in the elderly, or ileal resection or ileitis.

Although vitamin B12 produced by bacteria and fungi, they are not normally found in yeasts or higher plants. Most of the beneficial bacteria reside in large quantities in the gastrointestinal tracts of animals and humans and because of this presence in animals, food high in vitamin B12 are mostly meat products.