

The Most Essential Vitamins for Women Over 50

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Calorie needs decrease as we age partly due to loss of muscle tissue. Muscle burns more calories than fat. Less physical activity further reduces your calorie needs.

While calorie needs decrease, recommended amounts for certain vitamins and minerals also change. Here are important nutrients that women can get from food, multivitamins, and other dietary supplements as needed to feel their best.

Calcium

Menopause means a loss of estrogen, a hormone that helps the body absorb calcium from food and supplements, and also helps keep calcium in the bones to promote bone strength.

To help slow the rate of bone loss that can lead to osteoporosis, experts recommend increasing your daily calcium intake from 1,000 milligrams a day to 1,200 milligrams after age 50—the equivalent of four eight-ounce glasses of milk or other dairy products. Many women don't consume enough calcium before age 50, and they may not meet the increased needs after age 50.

Vitamin B6

Vitamin B6 may not get much attention, but it is important for heart health, energy production, and nervous system support. Vitamin B6 needs increase after age 50, and some studies suggest that older adults may need more than the current recommended levels.

Animal foods, such as meat, poultry, and fish, are some of the best sources of vitamin B6, and many breakfast cereals contain added vitamin B6. If you avoid foods rich in vitamin B6 or eat small amounts, you may not get enough of this important nutrient.

Iron

Red blood cells need iron to make enough hemoglobin, the protein that helps them carry oxygen throughout the body. Bleeding causes iron loss, and many women of childbearing age are iron deficient.

Iron deficiency is uncommon in postmenopausal women, largely because their monthly menstrual periods have stopped. The recommended iron intake drops by more than half after menopause, which many women begin around age 51. Iron is found in foods such as meat, poultry, fish, and fortified cereals.

Vitamin D

You don't need more or less vitamin D after age 50, but it's worth mentioning because many people don't get enough. Vitamin D aids in calcium absorption and, like calcium, helps reduce osteoporosis and the risk of fractures. Vitamin D may also play a role in heart health – an increasingly important priority as you age.

This nutrient is naturally found in high amounts in fatty fish and fortified foods, such as orange juice and milk. However, you would need about six glasses of milk or juice fortified with vitamin D to meet your daily needs. That's why many women need to supplement their diet with vitamin D to get the recommended amount.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is needed for the production of red blood cells, DNA formation, and proper digestion, among many other important functions. Age does not change your vitamin B12 needs, but it does determine the type of vitamin B12 you should consume.

After age 50, an estimated 10 to 30 percent of people absorb less natural vitamin B12 from foods such as meat, milk, and eggs. That's because the body produces less stomach acid, which is needed to absorb vitamin B12 in its natural form. Synthetic vitamin B12, the type added to fortified foods and supplements, can be absorbed without stomach acid.

If it's difficult to meet all of your changing requirements, multivitamins and supplements may help, but review your diet, as they are your main source of essential vitamins and minerals.

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