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## What is the benefit of vitamin E?

When you think of vitamin E benefits, the first thing that probably springs to mind is skincare. After all, vitamin E is a well-loved ingredient in any skincare routine. But it's also vital for your health and how your body functions.

The good news is, if you're eating a balanced and healthy diet, you're likely to be getting all the vitamin E benefits your body needs.

Dieticians Helen Bond and Clare Thornton-Wood from the [British Dietetic Association](#) explain what vitamin E is and why your body needs it.

### What is vitamin E?

Like most vitamins, vitamin E is a fat-soluble compound. That means they are absorbed along with fats in the diet and are stored in the body's fatty tissue and liver.

"One of the main properties of vitamin E is as an antioxidant, protecting the cells of the body from damage from free radicals; these are produced by pollutants such as cigarette smoke, air pollution and UV rays from the sun and also by the body itself when food is digested," Thornton-Wood explains.

"Vitamin in E is important for maintaining a healthy immune system and also for widening blood vessels and preventing blood clotting within them."

Bond adds that, because vitamin E acts to protect the cells from free radicals, there is some belief that it helps to prevent some cancers and coronary heart disease. However, she cautions that more work is needed to confirm these theories.

"What we do know is that vitamin E is important in maintaining overall health and well-being," she adds.

## Am I eating enough vitamin E?

If you're wondering if you eat enough vitamin E, the answer is most likely yes. Like all things good for you, it's found in many healthy foods.

Being deficient in vitamin E, or any other vitamin, is usually linked to a poor diet.

"Most people are able to get enough vitamin E in their diet, and it can be stored in the body, so it's not essential to be consumed in large amounts every day," Bond says.

"So, a deficiency is rare in this country, even in people with a chronic malabsorption of fats."

In the UK it is recommended adults consume 3–15 mg of vitamin E daily<sup>1</sup>.

"Vitamin E is found in wheatgerm, cereals and cereal products made with whole grains. It is also found in nuts and seeds and plant oils such as rapeseed, sunflower, corn, and olive oil," Thornton-Wood says.

"It is also added by manufacturers to some foods such as breakfast cereals and spreads and is in very small amounts in dark leafy greens.

"It is not difficult to obtain all the vitamin E benefits you need each day from food. Any not utilised that day can be stored by your body for future use."

## How to know if you are lacking in vitamin E

While deficiency in vitamin E isn't likely, there are some groups more prone to vitamin deficiency in general and in need of a higher intake of vitamin E.

"Vitamin E deficiency is rare and is generally linked to diseases where digestion or absorption of fat is an issue, such as in Crohn's disease and cystic fibrosis," Thornton-Wood explains.

"In extreme cases a lack of vitamin E can cause damage to your nerves and muscles, resulting in loss of feeling in your arms and legs, weakness of your muscles and problems with your vision.

"A lack of vitamin E also results in a weakened immune system."

## **Do I need to take vitamin E supplements?**

Thornton-Wood says: "Vitamin E supplements are generally not necessary for the population. Vitamin E is much better obtained from food which will then provide a range of other nutrients such as fibre, and other vitamins and minerals."

While there have been suggestions of health benefits linked to high doses of vitamin E, the jury is still out on whether supplementing with vitamin E is necessary, Bond adds.

"High doses of vitamin E have been implicated in promoting health and protecting against many diseases including heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, age-related macular degeneration and some cancers," she says.

"But so far there's not enough conclusive evidence that taking high doses of vitamin E supplements each day is essential. Instead, the effort should be on eating a healthy, balanced, and varied diet, and including plenty of foods that are naturally rich in vitamin E."

## **Can you have too much vitamin E?**

Like all things in life, you can end up with too much vitamin E, although it's extremely rare.

"Extreme amounts of vitamin E can increase risk of bleeding, as the ability of blood to clot is reduced," Thornton-Wood says.

"People on other medications should always consult a pharmacist before taking dietary supplements. In particular, vitamin E can interfere with the action of drugs such as warfarin (a blood thinner) and also the action of some chemotherapy drugs."

The safest take home message is, if you're worried about not getting enough vitamin E, make sure you're eating plenty of whole grains, nuts, seeds, and leafy greens. And if you're thinking about taking a supplement, always consult your pharmacist or GP first.

## Further reading

1. [Vitamins - British National Formulary.](#)

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Authored by: Andrea Downey	Peer Reviewed by: Dr Krishna Vakharia, MRCGP	
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