

Essential Vitamins YOU NEED TO KNOW

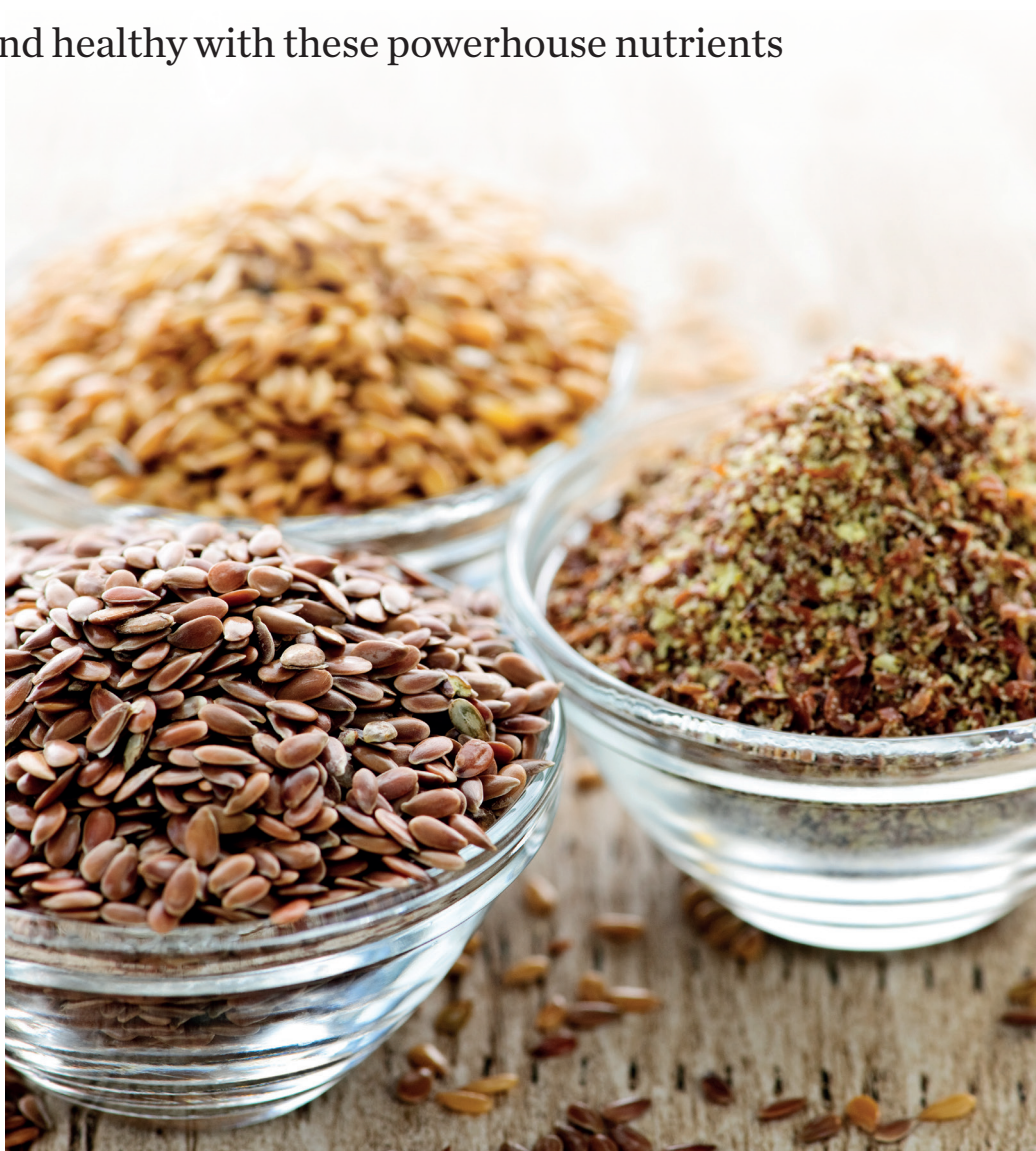
Stay happy and healthy with these powerhouse nutrients

“But how do you get your protein?” It’s a question thrown at many of us who follow a plant-based diet. But while you may roll your eyes, it is a valid point: are you getting all of your essential nutrients? When you first set about reducing your meat consumption, it can be a challenge to make sure you’re eating a well-balanced diet that’s packed with nutritious alternatives. Mays Al-Ali, nutritionist and founder of Samadhi Soul Retreats (healthymays.com), says, “I believe that everyone can thrive on a plant-based diet armed with the right nutritional knowledge. But, it’s important to get advice from a nutritionist, or to do your own thorough research when transitioning, as there are some common (but easily avoidable) pitfalls.”

PROTEIN POWER

Let’s start with the most obvious nutrient that is vital for any diet: protein. Without getting too scientific, what you essentially need to know is that protein is made up of various amino acids. Animal sources of protein contain this full range; however, plants only contain varying amounts. So, when you follow a plant-based diet, it’s important to combine protein sources – such as rice and lentils – throughout the day to ensure that you are getting a range of these amino acids.

Good sources of protein include pulses and beans; cereals made of wheat, oats or rice; soya products; nuts and seeds; and eggs and low-fat dairy products for vegetarians.



BRILLIANT B12

One of the most common vitamins for vegetarians and vegans to be deficient in is vitamin B12, as this is found naturally in foods from animal sources.

Lily Soutter, leading nutritionist at lilysouthernutrition.com, says, “If you are following a vegan diet, you will need to supplement B12 to ensure that you are consuming sufficient amounts of it. B12 is especially important for the

formation of blood as well as brain function. Deficiencies can result in fatigue, early dementia, increased risk of heart disease, lack of coordination, as well as possible development neurological disorders in babies of breastfeeding mothers.”

To ensure you have enough B12 in your diet, include yeast extract, such as Marmite; fortified breakfast cereals; and fortified soya products.

IRON IT OUT

As we are told as women, we're more prone to iron deficiency owing to our periods. But, that doesn't mean you should overcompensate, as too much iron can create inflammation in the body. Avoid taking iron supplements unless you've had a blood test, or have been advised by a doctor to do so. If you're deficient in iron, you may be anaemic, so take note if you often feel tired, have a lack of energy, shortness of breath, experience hair loss, or notice pale skin.

The good news is that there are plenty of plant-based foods that are rich in iron. Foods to add to your diet include pulses such as beans, lentils and peas; quinoa; nuts and pumpkin seeds; dried fruit like raisins; dark green, leafy vegetables like broccoli, spinach and kale; wholegrains like brown rice; tofu and tempeh; and cereals fortified with iron.

Top tip

Increasing your intake of vitamin C-rich fruit and veg, or taking vitamin C supplements at meal times can increase your absorption rate of iron by 3-4 times. A simple way to do this is to squeeze lemon juice on salads or meals that are high in iron.

MORE THAN STRONG BONES

While studies are always ongoing about the pros and cons of drinking cow's milk, those who prefer plant-based alternatives will need to source calcium from other places. Luckily, several foods are good sources of calcium: "Surprisingly, calcium is readily available in vegan diets, however this is only the case for those following a wholefood vegan diet," Lily says. "Dark green, leafy vegetables are always a great

choice, as they are also rich in magnesium, which can aid with the absorption of calcium. When choosing dairy-free milks, ensure that they are fortified with calcium, too." Other sources include: sesame seeds or tahini; pulses; dried fruit; and wholemeal bread.

THE GOOD FATS

Many of us are told that fish is a high source of omega-3, so finding plant-based alternatives can prove challenging.

"Omega-3 fats are primarily found in oily fish, and are essential for both brain and heart health," Lily explains. "They also play a positive role in depression and anxiety, as well as inflammatory conditions. So, if you really want glowing skin and shiny hair, then these oils shouldn't go amiss."

"In comparison to oily fish, there are very small amounts of omega-3 oils found in plant-based food. What's more, the oils found in plants also need to be converted to the active form, and the conversion rate is inefficient. This means that you would need to eat a whole load of flaxseeds just to receive a fraction of the omega-3 oils that you find in oily fish. So, in order to obtain a sufficient amount, daily dietary intake of ground flaxseed, flaxseed oil, chia seeds, chia seed oil, and walnuts is essential. Omega-3 fats are also found in microalgae, which can be taken in supplement form."

NOTICING DEFICIENCIES

If you start to observe any unusual, persistent symptoms – such as fatigue, dizziness, or hair loss – then you could be missing out on a particular vitamin. If you are concerned that you may be deficient in iron or B12, in particular, it's worth visiting your GP to have a blood test done, and to ask whether a multivitamin may be beneficial.

When it comes to boosting your intake with supplements, Mays recommends spending money on better-quality supplements, rather than own-store varieties: "Cheaper supplements often have lots of additives and fillers to bulk up the tablets," she says. "They also tend to have low doses that aren't therapeutic enough. Supplements that are based on whole foods and are locally produced in the UK are good to go."

VEGAN VITAMINS

BetterYou Vegan Health Oral Spray, £14.95, [betteryou.com](https://www.betteryou.com)

BetterYou's Vegan Health Oral Spray is designed to give you four essential vitamins and minerals – vitamin D3, B12, iron and iodine – in one go. Absorbed through the inner lining of the mouth, the mixed berry spray comes in a recycled bottle made from ocean plastic and post-consumer waste.



Hello Day Heart + Brain Maintain, £24, [hello-day.com](https://www.hello-day.com)

Stay active and alert with this supplement packed with omega-3 fats. Made from algae oil, it's designed to prepare you for better ageing and to prevent coronary heart disease.



Vitamin B12 Plus, £12.50, [wildnutrition.com](https://www.wildnutrition.com)

Formulated to support the normal function of the immune system and the reduction of tiredness and fatigue, this supplement is a great way for veggies to boost their B12 levels in a natural way.

