

What's Missing from our Diets?

In a nation where oversupply of food and over-nutrition is the dominating issue, it's surprising that there are still a number of nutrients that are lacking from many people's diets, as identified in the recent Australian Health Survey. Many are due to our woefully low intake of fruit, vegetables, and wholegrains.

Nutrient	What it does	Where to find it
Iodine	<p>Iodine is vital for the thyroid hormones that regulate body temperature, metabolic rate, reproduction, growth, blood cell production, nerve and muscle function, and more.</p> <p>Australian children have been identified as borderline iodine deficient, and bread is now fortified with iodine in Australia.</p>	<p>Seaweed and other sea vegetables, seafood, iodised salt. Plants grown in iodine-rich soils, and animals fed those plants.</p> <p>Fortified bread.</p>
Calcium	<p>The most abundant mineral in the body, calcium plays an essential role in bone structure, as well as muscle contraction and relaxation, nerve functioning, blood clotting and blood pressure.</p> <p>Unlike other minerals, blood concentration of calcium remains the same – if it drops too low your body 'steals' calcium from your bones.</p> <p>Sufficient calcium is vital for children, as they reach their peak bone mass between the ages of 12 and 15.</p> <p>Over half the Australian population, and 3 in 4 women, do not get enough calcium.</p>	<p>Milk, yoghurt and cheese are the richest sources.</p> <p>Canned fish with bones (sardines, salmon).</p> <p>Fortified soy milk.</p> <p>Green leafy vegetables, particularly broccoli, watercress, kale, and bok choy, almonds, tofu, dried figs, and tahini (sesame seed paste).</p> <p>Most people need at least 3 daily serves of dairy (or equivalent) to meet their calcium requirements.</p>
Fibre	<p>Prevents constipation. Helps reduce the risk of bowel cancer, and by feeding your gut's good bacteria, can help your body's immune function, even brain function.</p> <p>Soluble fibre such as that found in oats can reduce cholesterol absorption. Most Australian adults and children do not reach the target fibre intake of 25 to 30g/day.</p>	<p>Wholegrain breads and cereals. Look for breakfast cereals with 9g fibre or more per 100g.</p> <p>Legumes including lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans.</p> <p>Fruit and vegetables.</p>

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Iron	<p>One in 8 people over the age of two does not get sufficient iron, including 23% of females, and 3% of males. Iron deficiency is the most common nutritional deficiency in the world.</p> <p>Iron is essential for carrying oxygen in the blood to tissues around the body. It is also involved in making amino acids, collagen, hormones and neurotransmitters, and in making energy for use by the body's cells.</p> <p>Iron deficiency can cause fatigue even at fairly low levels, and can also affect behaviour and mental alertness particularly in children.</p>	<p>Red meat is the richest source of iron, and most easily absorbed. Oysters are also extremely rich in iron. However, 90% of our daily iron intake comes from non-meat sources: eggs, green leafy vegetables, peas and wholegrains, enriched cereals, dried fruit such as apricots, and legumes. Combine these foods with a source of vitamin C for enhanced absorption.</p>
Magnesium	<p>Magnesium is needed for more than 300 biochemical reactions in the body. It helps normal nerve and muscle function, supports the immune system, keeps the heartbeat steady, and helps bones stay strong.</p> <p>Magnesium also helps regulate blood glucose levels and aids the production of energy and protein.</p> <p>American figures suggest many people following a typical Western diet are low in magnesium, and as 6.8% of Australian population don't meet the recommended intake for vegetables, we are also at risk.</p>	<p>Pumpkin seeds are a very rich source (half cup = 100% day's supply), as is dark chocolate.</p> <p>Dark leafy greens, avocado, bananas, almonds walnuts, oats, wheatgerm, brown rice, low fat yoghurt, figs and dates.</p>
Vitamin A/beta carotene	<p>Its major roles include promoting vision, helping to make protein and generate new, healthy cells (especially skin cells), and supporting reproduction and growth.</p>	<p>Dark green and deep orange vegetables and fruit, particularly sweet potato, pumpkin, apricots and carrot, and in animal foods.</p>