

Why Vitamin B12 awareness is SO important, especially for vegans

Vitamin B12 is found in almost all foods of animal origin, so this is one of the most common deficiencies among vegans. A minute amount of vitamin B12 synthesis may occur in the gut via the bacteria living there, however so many people have gut issues and microbiome imbalances, that this is not good to rely on.

Vitamin B12 is critically important for vegetarians and especially vegans! There is no sustainable way you can get vitamin B12 from a vegan diet, unless you're eating fortified food, but even then, it may not be adequate.

Vitamin B12 is the only B vitamin that the body can store in the liver in minute amounts. If a person became vegan and had previously eaten animal products, this storage of B12 may last them for a few years at most. However, as deficiency risks vary widely for each individual, nutritional experts advise vegans to ensure a reliable, continuous intake of vitamin B12 immediately through fortified foods, or ideally supplementation, rather than waiting until stores deplete.

Therefore, you really **MUST** supplement with a Vitamin B12 if vegan.

The functions & benefits of Vitamin B12

- ✿ **Energy:** Vitamin B12 is known as 'The Energy Vitamin' because it's involved in the conversion of the food we eat into the energy we need.
- ✿ Vitamin B12 is essential for the growth and division of ALL cells in the body and for the production of red blood cells, which carry the oxygen to ALL of our cells. It is also needed to create DNA.
- ✿ **Supports the Nervous System:** Vitamin B12 is needed to produce 'myelin', a substance that forms a protective covering around your nerves and brain fibres. Myelin is critically important for proper brain and nerve function.
- ✿ B12 helps to regulate the nervous system and may reduce mood disorders such as depression and anxiety.
- ✿ **Mental performance and cognitive function:** Vitamin B12 is essential for neurotransmitter signalling, and adequate levels may improve cognition and help prevent cognitive decline.
- ✿ **Cardiovascular health:** without adequate Vitamin B12, homocysteine levels rise, and high homocysteine is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, including atherosclerotic diseases.
- ✿ **Metabolic health:** multiple metabolic functions rely on adequate levels of Vitamin B12; this includes enzyme production, digestion, DNA synthesis and hormonal balance.
- ✿ **Healthy skin, hair and nails:** because Vitamin B12 plays a major role in cell reproduction.
- ✿ **Pregnancy support:** as vitamin B12 is needed to create DNA, which is the basic genetic material used to create the entire body - it is a vital component of a healthy pregnancy.

Vitamin B12 deficiency signs and symptoms

+ Nerve issues

This can manifest as numbness, tingling, and in severe cases, neuropathy (early diagnosis is critical to avoid irreversible nerve damage).

+ Anaemia

Especially pernicious anaemia and megaloblastic anaemia; regarding red blood cell function and anaemias, Vitamin B12 and folate are intimately linked and should always be considered together, as a deficiency in one can mask a deficiency in the other.

+ Fatigue

As Vitamin B12 is needed to convert carbohydrates into usable glucose in the body, if it's missing, fatigue is a common result.

+ Mood disorders

Like depression and anxiety, difficulty focusing and an increased risk for attention disorders.

+ Cognitive decline

Poor memory, inability to concentrate; low Vitamin B12 levels are associated with Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia and Parkinson's disease.

+ Chronic stress

And/or feeling run down and exhausted.

+ Cardiovascular disease

High homocysteine levels, high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, heart problems such as palpitations.

+ Muscle aches

Muscle aches and weakness, joint pain.

+ Poor dental health

Including bleeding gums and mouth sores.

+ Lack of appetite

Digestive problems that may include nausea, diarrhoea and cramping.

The best plant-based food sources of Vitamin B12

Foods fortified with Vitamin B12 are the only real plant-based sources of Vitamin B12 so include foods such as yeast extract, vegan Marmite or yeast flakes, some plant milk alternatives, soya yoghurts and breakfast cereals.

Non-vegan food sources include

Meat and organ meats, especially liver and kidney

Eggs, especially the yolk

Herrings, sardines, mackerel, wild-caught salmon, oysters, clams

Feta cheese, cottage cheese, Swiss cheese

