



## **The Seven Nutrients Americans are Most Deficient In**

Eating healthy is on a lot of people's minds these days, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture's most recent National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) has found that many Americans' diets are still not up to par. The problem is not a lack of food, but rather a lack of nutritious foods that supply the vitamins and minerals our bodies depend on to function.

In fact, about 30 percent of the calories that Americans consume daily are from nutrient-poor junk foods like sweets, desserts, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages and salty snacks, a study published in the *Journal of Food Composition and Analysis* found.

"What is really alarming is the major contribution of 'empty calories' in the American diet," said Gladys Block, professor of epidemiology and public health nutrition at the University of California, Berkeley. "We know people are eating a lot of junk food, but to have almost one-third of Americans' calories coming from those categories is a shocker. It's no wonder there's an obesity epidemic in this country."

Further, probably as a result of not eating nutritious foods, many Americans are lacking in crucial nutrients. Ironically, Block points out, it's possible to be overweight and still be undernourished.

"It's important to emphasize that sweets, desserts, snacks and alcohol are contributing calories without providing vitamins and minerals," Block says. "In contrast, such healthy foods as vegetables and fruit make up only 10 percent of the caloric intake in the U.S. diet. A large proportion of Americans are undernourished in terms of vitamins and minerals. You can actually be obese and still be undernourished with regard to important nutrients. We shouldn't be telling people to eat less, we should be telling people to eat differently."

Fortunately, whether you are underweight or overweight, getting the nutrients you need is relatively easy if you concentrate on eating a healthy, varied diet. Keep reading to find out which foods you need to stock up on to nourish your body optimally.

### **Seven Nutrients Many Americans are Lacking**

The NHANES survey profiles what Americans are eating (based on about 9,000 people) compared to the Institute of Medicine's Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs). Based on their results, many Americans could use to up their intakes of the following seven nutrients.

## 1. Vitamin E

Vitamin E is an antioxidant that protects your cells from damaging free radicals, may protect against cancer and Alzheimer's disease, helps your cells to communicate effectively and helps to boost your immune system. However, up to 93 percent of Americans are not getting enough.

- **How Much You Should be Getting Daily:** 15 milligrams (for adults 14 years and older)
- **Excellent Food Sources:** Mustard greens, Swiss chard, sunflower seeds (raw, preferably), turnip greens, almonds, spinach, papaya and olives

## 2. Vitamin C

Over 30 percent of Americans are not getting enough vitamin C, which is crucial for boosting your immune system, helping wounds heal, protecting against cancer and fighting against free radical damage.

- **How Much You Should be Getting Daily:** Women (19 years and over) 75 mg, men (19 years and over) 90 mg
- **Excellent Food Sources:** Red bell peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, parsley, lemon juice, strawberries, romaine lettuce, tomatoes, cantaloupe, and grapefruit

## 3. Fiber

Fiber helps to support bowel regularity, maintain normal cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and may help you maintain a healthy weight by staving off hunger. However, upwards of 96 percent of Americans are not getting enough.

- **How Much You Should be Getting Daily:** For Americans aged 19-50, 38 g for men, 25 g for women
- **Excellent Food Sources:** Turnip greens, raspberries, broccoli, Swiss chard, raw celery, kidney and pinto beans, squash, strawberries and asparagus

## 4. Magnesium

About 56 percent of Americans are lacking in magnesium, a nutrient that is essential to build and strengthen your bones, keep your blood circulating smoothly, support your heart health and help your nerves and muscles to relax.

- **How Much You Should be Getting Daily:** For Americans aged 31 years and up, 420 mg for men, 320 mg for women
- **Excellent Food Sources:** Swiss chard, spinach, squash, pumpkin seeds, cucumbers, sunflower seeds, black beans and navy beans

## 5. Vitamin A

Vitamin A helps to preserve and improve your eyesight, promotes healthy skin and boosts your immune function, but about 44 percent of Americans aren't getting enough.

- **How Much You Should be Getting Daily:** For Americans aged 14 and up, 900 mcg for men, 700 mcg for women
- **Excellent Food Sources:** Raw carrots, calf's liver, sweet potatoes, cantaloupe, spinach, kale, romaine lettuce, apricots, red bell peppers

## 6. Calcium

About 70 percent of Americans don't get enough calcium, which helps maintain strong bones, supports nerve and muscle function, and may help maintain normal blood pressure.

- **How Much You Should be Getting Daily:** Americans aged 19-50, 1,000 mg. Those over 50, 1,200 mg
- **Excellent Food Sources:** Yogurt, sesame seeds, milk, spinach, greens (mustard, turnip and collard), broccoli, cabbage, Brussel sprouts, asparagus, oranges

## 7. Potassium

Potassium helps your nerves and muscles function properly, maintains normal blood pressure and helps regulate body fluids, yet 97 percent of Americans aren't getting enough.

- **How Much You Should be Getting Daily:** For Americans aged 19 and up, 4,700 mg
- **Excellent Food Sources:** Swiss chard, spinach, crimini mushrooms, lima beans, avocado, pinto beans, papaya, lentils, eggplant, beets, strawberries