

Vitamin A keeps our bodies healthy

FACT

Our body needs vitamin A because:

- it protects against illness
- it helps the body to recover more quickly from illness
- it helps to keep eyes healthy
- it helps to keep the skin, gut and lungs healthy.

People who do not eat enough vitamin A are more likely to become ill and die. Children especially are at high risk. Thousands of children die every year because of lack of vitamin A.

The first signs of vitamin A deficiency are night blindness, dry eyes and eye infections.

Vitamin A can be found in a variety of animal and plant foods

Animal foods that have plenty of vitamin A:

- Liver and kidney
- Eggs and milk
- Butter and cheese
- Whole dried fish (including liver)

The body can easily use vitamin A from animal foods.

Plant foods that have plenty of vitamin A:

- orange and yellow vegetables (e.g. carrots, pumpkin, orange and yellow sweet potatoes)
- green leafy vegetables (e.g. spinach, amaranthus, kale)
- orange and yellow fruits (e.g. ripe mangoes, ripe pawpaws)
- fresh red palm oil

To get more vitamin A from plant foods, cook them (if possible) and add some fat or oil.

The darker the green vegetables are, the more vitamin A they have.

Some fats and oils that increase vitamin A absorption are butter and margarine, vegetable oil, groundnut or sunflower oil.

For babies under 6 months the best source of vitamin A is breast milk, if the mother has enough vitamin A.

In areas with vitamin A deficiency, health workers advise supplements for breastfeeding women and children

Vitamin A supplements might be given to young children and women within six weeks after giving birth.

High dosages of vitamin A supplements should not be given to women during pregnancy because they might harm the unborn baby.

Local health care centres will give advice on adequate supplements and dosages.

ACT

- ❖ To get enough vitamin A eat at least one vitamin A-rich food per day, e.g.:
1 table spoon of red palm oil 1 medium-sized mango, 1 egg-sized piece of liver, 1 medium-sized small pawpaw, 1 medium-sized yellow sweet potato or 1.5 cups of green leafy vegetables.
- ❖ Cook vitamin A-rich vegetables and add some oil to help your body make use of the vitamin.
- ❖ If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, eat plenty of vitamin A-rich foods to stay healthy and to make sure your child stays healthy and grows well.
- ❖ Give plenty of vitamin A-rich foods to children 6 months and older. They prevent illness and night blindness and save lives.
- ❖ If you are breastfeeding or have young children, ask your local health care centre if you or your children need vitamin A tablets.