

Magnesium

BY CYNTHIA RAMNARACE

Mention bone health and you think calcium. Mention immunity and you think zinc. But magnesium impacts these functions and more, making it quite likely the most important mineral no one talks about.

Along with fostering strong bones and healthy immune systems, magnesium aids some 300 other body processes. It helps muscles and nerves function, keeps heart rate steady, regulates blood sugar and keeps blood pressure within the normal range.

What Should I Know?

Magnesium research is growing because of the extent of its applications. Currently, scientific research implicates magnesium deficiency as a culprit in 22 conditions, says Carolyn Dean, MD, ND, author of *The Magnesium Miracle*. They include anxiety, asthma, depression, insomnia, PMS, preeclampsia, polycystic ovary syndrome, ADHD, autism, cerebral palsy and SIDS.

The links between magnesium and high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease are the most researched, although the scientific community has yet to conclusively determine if increased magnesium intake prevents or treats these conditions.

Because of the inconclusive research, registered dietitian Donna Feldman cautions anyone considering magnesium dosing to first talk with his or her doctor. "Some of these studies are poorly done, and yet they are being written about as if they were definitive," Feldman says.

What is certain is that magnesium helps tremendously while kids grow bones and muscles. "With children going through their growth spurts, magnesium is very important to keep the muscles both strong and relaxed and not cramped," Dr. Dean says.

Magnesium is also crucial during pregnancy and breast-feeding. A pregnant woman's blood volume increases greatly during pregnancy, and magnesium aids blood production. While breast-feeding, the baby needs magnesium to grow bone. If the mother takes in too little of the mineral, her body will steal it from her own bones.

Where Can I Find Magnesium?

VEGETABLES

Leafy greens are a leading source of magnesium. Opt for spinach over iceberg lettuce—the greener the leaf, the higher the magnesium.

Note: Like sushi? Get yours wrapped in seaweed for a boost of magnesium and calcium.

NUTS, LEGUMES AND SEEDS

Almonds, cashews, soybeans and peanuts are good sources, so a PB&J in your child's lunchbox helps meet his or her magnesium needs. If your child is peanut averse, serve soy milk instead.

Note: One cup of semi-sweet chocolate candies—made from cocoa beans—packs a whopping 193mg of magnesium, nearly half an adult man's recommended daily allowance.

SUPPLEMENTS

If you eat a balanced diet, food alone will provide enough magnesium to meet the recommended daily requirement, says Feldman. But Dr. Dean believes the federal recommendation is too low and that, in order to prevent or treat disease, people should consume 600mg of magnesium per day from both food and supplement sources.

Note: The Institute of Medicine has determined that toxicity can occur when taking more than 350mg of magnesium supplement.

How Much Do I Need?

The Institute of Medicine has established a recommended daily allowance of magnesium for those over age one. For infants, the adequate intake level is based on the amount of magnesium in breast milk.



BABIES

0–6 mos: 30mg
7–12 mos: 75mg



CHILDREN

1–3 years: 80mg
4–8 years: 130mg



TWEENS/TEENS

9–13: 240mg
Males 14–18: 410mg
Females 14–18: 360mg



WOMEN

310mg



WOMEN

Pregnant (over 18):
350–400mg

Lactating (over 18):
310–360mg



MEN

400mg