



Be in the know: Diagnosing and treating a vitamin B-12 deficiency

Vitamin B-12 plays a vital role in the proper functioning of our bodies. Here, we'll provide an overview of vitamin B-12 deficiency, its symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment. So, let's get started and be in the know about vitamin B-12 deficiency.

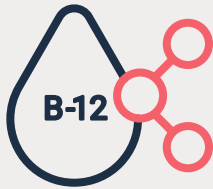


Understanding **Vitamin B-12** and its importance

Vitamin B-12, also known as cobalamin, is a water-soluble vitamin that is essential for maintaining a healthy nervous system, brain function, and the formation of red blood cells. It also plays a critical role in DNA synthesis, energy production, and the metabolism of proteins and fats. **Our bodies cannot produce vitamin B-12, so we must obtain it through our diet, primarily from animal-based foods such as meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products.**

Causes and symptoms of Vitamin B-12 deficiency

Vitamin B-12 deficiency can result from various factors, including poor diet, malabsorption issues, and certain medications. Vegetarians, vegans, and elderly individuals are more susceptible to developing a deficiency due to their dietary restrictions or age-related decline in absorption capacity.



Symptoms of vitamin B-12 deficiency can be subtle or severe, depending on the individual and the extent of the deficiency.

Common signs include fatigue, weakness, pale skin, shortness of breath, dizziness, mood changes, and memory problems. If left untreated, the deficiency can lead to severe neurological issues, anaemia, and even irreversible damage to the nervous system.

How many people are affected by B-12 deficiency

According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, B-12 deficiency affects around 6% of people aged under 60. This rises to approximately 11% of people eating a vegan diet and around 20% in people aged 60 and over. These statistics underscore the importance of being aware of the risk factors and addressing a deficiency before it leads to serious health complications.



Diagnosing Vitamin B-12 deficiency

If you suspect you have a vitamin B-12 deficiency, it is essential to consult your GP. They will likely perform a blood test to check your B-12 levels and may also recommend other tests to rule out other potential causes for your symptoms. In some cases, a GP may order further tests such as a Schilling test or a methylmalonic acid (MMA) test to confirm the diagnosis and identify the underlying cause of the deficiency.

Treatment options for Vitamin B-12 deficiency

The treatment for vitamin B-12 deficiency depends on the cause and severity of the condition. In mild cases, increasing the intake of vitamin B-12 through dietary sources or oral supplements may be enough. For more severe deficiencies, particularly those resulting from absorption issues, high-dose oral supplements or vitamin B-12 injections may be necessary.



Dietary sources of Vitamin B-12

A balanced diet rich in vitamin B-12 can help prevent or reverse mild deficiencies. **Foods high in vitamin B-12 include:**



Meat:

beef, liver, chicken, and turkey



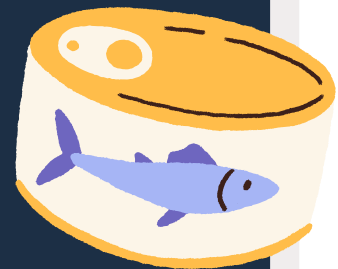
Fish:

salmon, tuna, trout, and sardines



Dairy products:

milk, yogurt, cheese, and eggs



For vegetarians and vegans, it can be more challenging to obtain adequate levels of vitamin B-12 from dietary sources alone. However, there are still some options available:



Fortified breakfast cereals:

Some cereals are fortified with vitamin B-12, providing an excellent source for those on a plant-based diet.



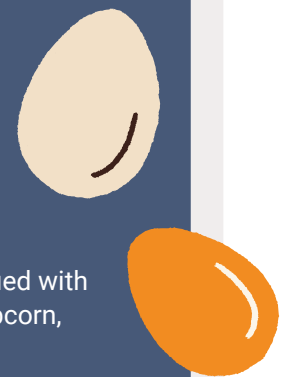
Nutritional yeast:

This deactivated yeast is a popular vegan food additive that is often fortified with vitamin B-12. It can be sprinkled on a variety of dishes, such as pasta, popcorn, and salads.



Fortified plant-based milk:

Many plant-based milk alternatives, such as almond, soy, and oat milk, are fortified with vitamin B-12. Check the labels to ensure you are getting the added vitamins.





Oral supplements and injections

If dietary sources are not enough to address a vitamin B-12 deficiency, your GP may recommend oral supplements or injections. High-dose oral supplements are available over the counter and can be an effective option for those with mild absorption issues. In more severe cases, vitamin B-12 injections may be prescribed. These injections are usually administered by a healthcare professional and can be given weekly, monthly, or as needed, depending on the severity of the deficiency.



Preventing Vitamin B-12 deficiency

Taking steps to prevent vitamin B-12 deficiency is vital, especially for individuals at higher risk, such as vegans, vegetarians, and the elderly. Maintaining a balanced diet rich in vitamin B-12 sources, taking supplements as needed, and monitoring your B-12 levels through regular check-ups with your GP can help ensure you stay healthy and avoid potential complications.

Vitamin B-12 deficiency is a common but often overlooked health issue that can have serious consequences if left untreated. Consult your GP if you suspect a deficiency and remember that a balanced diet, regular check-ups, and appropriate supplementation can go a long way in maintaining your overall health. **Stay informed, stay healthy, and be in the know about vitamin B-12 deficiency.**



Contact your HealthHero or Validium service today for more support and advice.

