

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 plays a role in making DNA and also helps keep nerve cells and red blood cells healthy.

What is vitamin B12 deficiency?

Vitamin B12 is not made by your body so the only way to get it is from consuming animal-based foods or from supplements. The amount of vitamin B12 you need depends on your age, diet, medical conditions and medications you take. A vitamin B12 deficiency can occur if you have certain conditions, such as:

- Atrophic gastritis, in which your stomach lining has thinned
- Pernicious anemia, which makes it hard for your body to absorb vitamin B12
- Surgery that removed part of your stomach or small intestine, including weight loss surgery
- Small intestine conditions, such as Crohn's disease, celiac disease, bacterial growth, or a parasite
- Heavy drinking
- Immune system disorders, such as Graves' disease or lupus
- Long-term use of acid-reducing drugs

You can also have a deficiency if you're a vegan or vegetarian, since you may not be eating animal products, eggs or dairy products. Babies born to mothers who are vegan or vegetarian may also not get enough vitamin B12.

What are symptoms of Vitamin B12 deficiency?

A deficiency of vitamin B12 can lead to anemia. While a mild deficiency may cause no symptoms, if left untreated, it may progress and cause symptoms such as:

- Weakness
- Heart palpitations
- Shortness of breath
- Pale skin
- Smooth tongue
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Nerve problems
- Vision loss
- Tiredness
- Depression
- Memory loss
- Behavioral changes

What should I do with my results?

It is always recommended you meet with a healthcare provider to determine what your laboratory test results mean to you. Your healthcare provider will review all of your test results and, combined with your health history, will be able to provide an accurate picture of your health status.

If your results were low: A low vitamin B12 level in a person with signs and symptoms likely indicates that the person has a deficiency, but does not necessarily reflect the severity of the anemia or associated neuropathy. Additional tests are usually done to investigate the underlying cause of the deficiency in order to properly treat the condition.

If your results were within normal range: A normal vitamin B12 level may indicate you do not have a deficiency and that the signs and symptoms are likely due to another cause. You should share your results with your healthcare provider, who may request additional testing to determine the cause of your symptoms.

What other resources are available to learn more about my health and laboratory tests?

- Lab Tests Online: labtestsonline.org
- WebMD: webmd.com

DLO Direct offers direct access to laboratory testing for informational purposes. A DLO Direct lab test result is not a medical diagnosis and is not intended as medical advice. Only a healthcare provider can interpret lab results and diagnose a medical condition or disease.

Because tests have not been ordered by a healthcare provider, third party entities, including Medicare and Medicaid, will not reimburse for these tests.



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