

Vitamin C and Health

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In the mid 18th century, British sailors, whose diet consisted primarily of bread and meat, began to succumb to several painful and deadly symptoms. The symptoms included bleeding gums, loose teeth, poor wound healing and, eventually, death. Today, we know this disease as scurvy. It was later discovered that introducing citrus fruits such as limes, lemons and oranges slowly healed the condition and prevented the illness in others. Fast forward to the early 20th century: A Hungarian biochemist, Albert Szent-Györgyi, discovered ascorbic acid popularly known as Vitamin C.

Sources of Vitamin C

Vitamin C is an essential water-soluble vitamin and a powerful antioxidant. Women need approximately 75 mg every day while men require approximately 90 mg. Due to the presence of free radicals and harmful oxidants, smokers will

require an additional 30-35 mg of Vitamin C per day (NIH, 2020). Citrus fruits are a common source of Vitamin C; however, they are not the only source. Below is a list of food items that are high in Vitamin C:

Food (Serving Size)	Milligrams (mg) of Vitamin C
Red Bell Pepper (1 large raw)	209 mg
Green Bell Pepper (1 large raw)	131 mg
Broccoli (1 cup)	102 mg
Vegetable Juice (1 cup)	72 mg
Strawberries (1 cup, raw)	98 mg
Grapefruit (1 whole fruit)	79 mg
Orange (1 whole fruit)	70 mg

Health Benefits

While Vitamin C became famous for preventing and treating scurvy, we have since discovered many other benefits. Vitamin C benefits our health by:

- Reducing the risk of heart disease and cancer through antioxidant properties
- Boosting immunity by promoting white blood cell synthesis
- Increasing collagen synthesis
- Participating in the creation of neurotransmitters
- Reducing how our body responds to stress

As you can see, Vitamin C is a crucial vitamin for treating and preventing disease. The USDA recommends that we consume 2-3 servings (2-3 cups) of both fruits and vegetables every day. It is also important to incorporate a diverse amount of fruits and vegetables to make sure that we acquire all our necessary nutrients. Keep this in mind as you are preparing your next meal in order to keep you and your family healthy and thriving!

Resources:

Blake, J. S., Munoz, K. D., & Volpe, S. (2019). Nutrition, From Science to You. 4th Ed. Pearson.

Carr, A. C., & Maggini, S. (2017). Vitamin C and Immune Function. Nutrients.

National Institutes of Health. (2020). Vitamin C [Fact sheet]. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminC-HealthProfessional/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture (n.d.). www.choosemyplate.gov

