

6 WARNING SIGNS... you could be vitamin deficient

A lack of certain vitamins and minerals can play havoc with your health. Clinical Nutritionist **Suzie Sawyer** looks at some of the most common deficiencies, and what you can do to help

Muscle cramps



Frequent muscle cramps may be a sign that you're low in magnesium.

'It plays a role in over 300 metabolic processes, triggering a lot of important enzyme processes within the body,' says Suzie. 'It's vital for proper nerve and muscle function, and helps regulate calcium absorption. Low magnesium can lead to painful cramps and spasms, including period pains.' Other symptoms may include insomnia, chronic fatigue, lack of energy, irritability and low mood.

Fix it

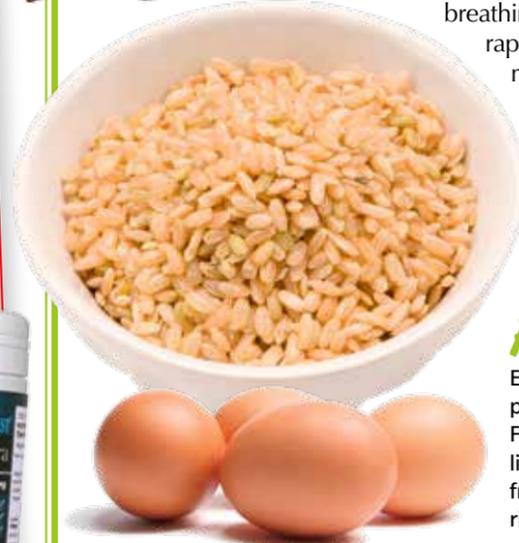
Eat plenty of magnesium-rich leafy greens, oily fish, nuts and seeds. Avoid processed foods, and cut back on tea and coffee, as these deplete magnesium. Certain medications (such as antibiotics, insulin and the Pill) also deplete magnesium.

SUPPLEMENT HELP

Try Nature's Best MagAsorb Ultra (£11.50 for 120 tablets, naturesbest.co.uk)



Feeling tired



'A vitamin B12 deficiency causes a range of symptoms, including debilitating fatigue,' says Suzie. 'Others may include breathing problems, rapid heartbeat, memory and concentration issues,

weakness, balance problems, pins and needles (in legs and feet), and numbness in the legs. Low iron levels can lead to anaemia, with symptoms of tiredness, palpitations and shortness of breath.' Ask your GP for a blood test.

Fix it

Eat foods that contain vitamin B12, such as poultry, meat, eggs, fish and dairy products. Foods that are high in iron include red meat, liver, offal, nuts, eggs, dark, leafy greens, dried fruits (apricots, raisins), wholegrains, brown rice, nuts and beans.

SUPPLEMENT HELP

Try Pharmaton Vitality (£9.45 for 30 capsules, boots.com) or BioCare Vitasorb B12 (£5.60 for 15ml)



Dandruff

'Dandruff may indicate that you're low in the mineral selenium, and also vitamin B6,' says Suzie. 'This is often caused by an overgrowth of yeast. So selenium deficiency can also make you more prone to fungal infections generally, such as fungal skin conditions, thick, discoloured nails and thrush. Selenium is also essential for a healthy thyroid, and recent studies suggest that low levels may increase the risk of coronary heart disease.'

Fix it

Eat selenium-rich foods – Brazil nuts (three a day), kidney, liver, fish, eggs, cheese, mushrooms, sunflower seeds, oats, nuts, chicken, turkey, beef, salmon, brown rice and wholegrain rye.



SUPPLEMENT HELP

Try Nature's Best Organic Selenium (£8.50 for 180 tablets, naturesbest.co.uk)

Sore lips

This may indicate you're short of vitamin B2. 'A dry mouth with cracks around the corners of lips and an inflamed tongue are classic signs,' says Suzie.

Other symptoms may indicate a lack of other B vitamins: irritability and mood swings (B6); skin problems, insomnia and diarrhoea (B3); anxiety and nerves (B5); poor memory and lack of clarity (B1); poor appetite weakness, depression, (B1).

Fix it

'B vitamins are water-soluble, so they're easily excreted,' says Suzie. 'You also use more vitamin B when you're stressed, so you need to replenish supplies regularly, with diet and/or supplements.' Good sources include meat, dairy, green veg, pulses (such as beans and lentils),

wheatgerm and wholegrain cereals, nuts, seeds and fruit. Tea, coffee and alcohol all deplete B vitamins.

SUPPLEMENT HELP

Try Alive! B-Complex Soft Jelly Multi-Vitamin (£14.99 for 60, feelaliveuk.com)



Muscle/joint pain

Muscle and joint pain may indicate a lack of vitamin D. 'We need it to help our body absorb nutrients like calcium and phosphorus, for strong bones and healthy muscles,' says Suzie. 'Vitamin D also helps to regulate blood pressure and improve cardiovascular health by protecting blood vessels.'

Research published in the *British Medical Journal* suggests that more than 3,000,000 of us could avoid colds and flu if we took vitamin D supplements.

Fix it

Latest findings show that 23% of us are deficient in vitamin D

throughout the year, and this figure rises to 40% in winter.

- Boost your vitamin D levels by:
- ❖ Spending 20-30 minutes outdoors with skin exposed whenever it's sunny. This is because vitamin D is produced as a result of the interaction of the sun on the skin.
 - ❖ Eating vitamin D-rich foods, such as oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, fresh tuna); dairy, wholegrains and fortified foods such as bread and cereals.

SUPPLEMENT HELP

Try taking BioCare Bio-D (400iu) Vitamin D Liquid (£8.65 for 15ml, biocare.co.uk)



Skin problems

Dry skin, eczema and acne are a sign you may be lacking omega-3 essential fatty acids (EFAs). 'EFAs have a natural anti-inflammatory effect that's beneficial for skin,' says Suzie.

They may also help protect against heart disease and certain cancers, and improve mood and cognitive function.

Fix it

Omega-3 essential fatty acids are found in oily fish (salmon, pilchards, sardines and fresh tuna). Aim to eat at least 140mg (two 70g portions) every week.



SUPPLEMENT HELP

Try Solgar Double Strength Omega-3 Fish Oil (£14.50 for 30 soft gels, solgaronline.co.uk)

