

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

October 21, 2005

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:makeith@ifas.ufl.edu

### Too Much of a Good Vitamin A?

With all the emphasis on needing lots of vitamins, is it possible to get too much? Should I stop eating so many dried apricots? That question came up recently concerning how much vitamin A there is in some fruits and vegetables. The answer depends on what you are eating, or taking.

Let's start at the beginning, the vitamin A. We can get our vitamin A in two different forms. One, the active preformed vitamin, comes in animal products, mainly liver, fish oils, eggs and dairy products, especially milk and butter fortified with vitamin A. This form is also common in many vitamin supplements and fortified 'health' foods.

The other form of vitamin A is the pre-vitamin. These are carotenoids that give carrots and apricots their dark orange color. They are also found in dark green vegetables such as spinach, collards and broccoli. Our body has to change the carotenoids into the active form. Some supplements provide carotenoids and let our body do the work.

The problem of toxic levels only comes when a person eats excess amounts of the preformed or active kind, called retinol. If a pregnant woman eats too much retinol her baby might be born with deformities. If children or adults eat too much, they might suffer from headache, nausea, ringing in the ears and double vision. Pain in the joints and muscles or dry, brittle fingernails are other problems caused by too much vitamin A. Luckily, simply taking less of the vitamin will allow the body to get rid of the excess and the symptoms will gradually go away.

What happens if a person eats too much carotenoid? The body will not make more vitamin A than it needs. If there is more coming in than the liver can break down and get rid of, the body will store it where it does no damage. That place happens to be the skin. Eventually their skin will begin to turn orange or yellow! Not eating more dark green or orange fruits and vegetables will allow the body to gradually dispose of the excess, and slowly the skin will return to its normal color.

So, back to the first questions, yes, you can get too much. But no, eating too many dried apricots, or fresh persimmons or cooked broccoli is not going to kill you. If you get your vitamins as fruits and vegetables, you are not going to overdose. People who love liver would be at most risk, but even they are not likely to eat more than 3 or 4 ounces in a day, and not likely to continue to do so for days or weeks at a time.

The danger comes mainly from taking too many vitamin supplements that contain preformed retinol. The most that adults should take in one day is 3,000 mcg (micrograms) or 10,000 IU (International Units) a day of retinol, the preformed vitamin A. Children should be limited to 3,000 mcg. Since one cup of fortified milk only has about 140 mcg, they would need to drink over a gallon of milk a day to reach dangerous levels. That is not likely, but several vitamin pills a day would be much easier to swallow, and just as dangerous.

If you have or take vitamin supplements, read the labels. Keep them out of reach of children, and don't give adult vitamins to children. Add up the vitamin A from all the fortified foods and supplements you normally eat. If the amount approaches the upper limit, cut back on some of them.

To get a safe form of vitamin A, try some of the pumpkin or squash available in the markets this season. Here's a wonderful sweet potato and orange dish. You can

make it in a casserole dish, or for something fancy, pull the membranes out of the orange shells and fill them with the sweet potatoes.

### Orange Sweet Potatoes

6 medium sweet potatoes	3 Tbsp butter or margarine
1 C orange juice (5 large oranges)	2 Tbsp brown sugar
2 Tbsp flour	2 egg whites
1/4 tsp nutmeg	1 tsp salt
1 Tbsp orange zest	

Scrub and cook potatoes until soft. Cut oranges in half and squeeze out juice. Save shells if desired. Preheat oven to 350° F. Remove potato skins, place in large bowl.

Whip potatoes until smooth. Whip in butter, then remaining ingredients. If using orange skins, remove membranes and cut a 1 inch ring from each half. Set in lightly buttered casserole dish and pile potatoes into rings, or simply transfer the potatoes to the buttered casserole. Bake for 45 min. Serves 10.

*Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.*

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS, STATE OF FLORIDA, IFAS, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING