

Is Vitamin C Really for Colds?

This time of year many people start taking extra vitamin C. The common belief is that taking C will help protect you from catching a cold. It's certainly a boost for the vitamin manufacturers, but how much help is it really, for you?

Unfortunately right now, there is not one straight answer for that. Some studies have looked at preventing colds, others looked at how severe the symptoms were, while others looked at how long the colds lasted. And, as with so much medical research, they did not agree on the results!

At this point, the general medical agreement is that if you start taking vitamin C when you think you feel a cold coming on – it's too late! At that point all the vitamin C tablets are doing is making someone else feel better about their profits. If you take extra vitamin C all the time to prevent those colds, it still won't do you much good. Almost all the medical studies found that you're likely to get as many colds as the next person down the street.

But – here's the good news - your cold might not last as long as the other person's who didn't take vitamin C regularly. And the symptoms you get might not be as miserable as the other person's. So it's up to you to decide if the cost of all the extra vitamin C is worth 1 day less of cold symptoms several times a year.

The next question is - How much should you take? Here too there are different points of view. If you measured the vitamin C levels in your blood before you started taking supplements, and then gradually increased the amount you take, what do you think would happen? Most people assume that the blood levels would go up. And they'd be right, but only for a little while! What actually happens is that as we start putting more in our mouths, our kidneys start squirting more out when we urinate. So after we get to about 500 mg of vitamin C a day, our blood levels don't go up any more.

The other way our bodies control how much is in our blood is that our guts stop absorbing as much of it. When there's enough in the blood, what we take in just keeps going through the intestines and comes out the other end. Both controls mean that it can be pretty expensive to flush the toilet!

For some people, their stomachs revolt at high doses, especially at amounts over 2,000 mg a

day. Instead of just sending it on down the line, these people get cramps, nausea, diarrhea and severe pain in the gut. So don't overdo it!

The recommended amount to keep most people healthy is only 90 mg a day for men and 75 mg a day for women. However, anything over 400 mg is mostly removed in the urine. Just eating the recommended 5 servings a day of fruits and veggies will usually provide about 200 mg. That's more than double the basic needs. If you do take a supplement, taking several smaller doses at different times of day is usually better than taking one big dose.

Please don't think you are stuck with drinking orange juice to get your C. Actually sweet peppers have more vitamin C than oranges, and red peppers have more than green peppers. Other citrus fruit, kiwis, cantaloupe and strawberries (our local ones are here!) are all good sources of vitamin C. So are veggies such as broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes, cabbage and Brussels sprouts. Even baked potatoes have C!

Here's a way to add color to your plate and some vitamin C to your menu. Use one red and one green pepper for extra color. Happy, healthy eating!

Stuffed Green Peppers

2 large bell peppers	½ to ¾ pound lean ground beef
1/3 cup chopped onion	1/3 cup long grain rice, dry
1 cup chopped tomatoes, fresh or canned	¼ cup water
1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce	pinch of ground pepper
½ tsp dried oregano or Italian seasoning	½ cup shredded mozzarella cheese

Preheat oven to 375°F. Cut peppers in half lengthwise and remove seeds and white tissue. Dip in boiling water for 3 minutes. Remove and set cut side down to drain completely. Brown beef in skillet with onion, stirring to crumble beef, until meat is brown and onion is tender. Add tomatoes with their juice, rice, water and seasonings. Bring to boil. Cover and simmer 16-18 minutes until rice is tender. Remove from heat, stir in half the cheese. Arrange pepper halves in baking dish. Mound as much of meat mixture as will fit into the peppers. Form remaining meat into balls and set around peppers in pan. Bake 15 minutes. Sprinkle rest of cheese over peppers and meat and let sit 1-2 minutes to melt. Serves 4.

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