

Selenium

Why is selenium important?

Selenium is a trace mineral that is part of many important enzymes, which are substances that our bodies make to speed up chemical reactions.

The amount of selenium in a plant food varies depending on how much was in the soil the food was grown in. Vegans in Europe may have lower intakes than those living in countries with higher soil selenium or the extensive use of high-selenium imported produce, such as Canadian wheat flour.

How much selenium do you need?

In the UK, the recommended daily selenium intakes for adults are 60 mcg (micrograms) for women and 75 mcg for men. This assumes that a higher intake is required for people with a higher body weight.

How can you get enough selenium?

Arguably, taking a selenium supplement may be the most reliable way to guarantee an adequate intake and to ensure that you do not develop a selenium deficiency.

Daily consumption of certain plant-based foods can make significant contributions to selenium intakes, such as a couple of Brazil nuts or bread made from Canadian wheat flour.^{2,3} However, the selenium content of Brazil nuts is particularly variable and some research has raised concerns about the amounts of barium and radium that may be found in these nuts.³ Other vegan sources of selenium include mushrooms, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, tofu and brown rice.

Selenium tip to take away

Taking a supplement containing selenium is a reliable way of guaranteeing an adequate intake.

Further information

You might be interested to check out the following webpages at www.vegansociety.com:

- [Nutrition overview](#)
- [Life stages](#), including pregnancy, breastfeeding and different age groups

References

1. Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition. *Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom* London: HMSO; 1991
2. Thomson CD, Chisholm A, McLachlan SK & Campbell JM. Brazil Nuts: an Effective Way to Improve Selenium Status. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2008; 87: 379–384
3. Rayman, MP. Food-chain Selenium and Human Health: Emphasis on Intake. *British Journal of Nutrition* 2008; 100: 254–268