

Iodine



Why it's important

Your body uses iodine to make thyroid hormones. These hormones control how fast your cells work. Every vegan needs a reliable source of iodine in their diet.

Recommended intake

In the UK, the recommended iodine intake for adults is 140mcg (micrograms) per day¹. There have been concerns that some people in the UK are not getting enough iodine, including teenage girls, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people who do not eat milk products and fish². However, it is also important to avoid too much iodine because this can lead to thyroid disorders.

Sources of iodine

There is no easy way of knowing how much iodine is in plant foods. Plant foods (apart from seaweed) may contain a low amount of iodine. Also, the amount of iodine in plant foods varies depending on how much is in the soil the plant is grown in.

Seaweed is a source of iodine, and one and a half to two sheets (4g) of nori might provide the recommended daily intake³. However, the iodine content of seaweed is variable, and both spikes and long-term increases in iodine intake have been linked to thyroid problems⁴. You can easily consume too much iodine by eating kelp, and hijiki should be avoided because it contains high levels of arsenic⁵.

Iodised salt is not a good option because public health authorities recommend that we cut down on salt.

Arguably, a supplement is the most reliable way of meeting your iodine requirement.

Summary

- Every vegan needs a reliable source of iodine in their diet
- In the UK, the recommended daily iodine intake for adults is 140mcg
- Arguably, a supplement is the most reliable way of meeting your iodine requirement (please discuss the use of supplements with a health professional to ensure that they are suitable for you)
- If you do not want to use a supplement, consider eating seaweed as detailed above

References

1. COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASPECTS OF FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY (1991) *Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom*, London: HMSO
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