

Selenium

Why is selenium important?

Selenium is an essential nutrient and an antioxidant. It is a key part of many important enzymes, which are substances that our bodies make to speed up chemical reactions. Selenium plays an important role in immunity, thyroid health and sperm production.

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.

Selenium recommendations are lower for children below the age of 15. You can head to our [Life stages](#) pages for more information on childhood selenium requirements.

How can vegans get enough selenium?

Dietary sources of selenium for vegans include brown rice, baked beans, mushrooms, sunflower and sesame seeds, tofu, and whole oats. However, the selenium content in these foods can vary significantly depending on the nutrient density of the soil where they are grown. This is especially relevant for vegans living in the UK and Europe, where soil selenium levels tend to be low.

Brazil nuts are an exception, and an unusually rich plant-based source of selenium. Consuming 5-6 Brazil nuts daily can provide 64-76 mcg of selenium, which meets the needs of older teenagers and adults. However, some researchers have raised concerns about relying solely on Brazil nuts for selenium intake due to potential exposure to barium and radium found in these nuts.

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.

The Vegan Society sells a daily vitamin and mineral supplement called VEG 1, which is specifically designed for vegans and includes selenium along with iodine, vitamin B12, and vitamin D to promote health and support nutrient intake alongside a healthy, balanced vegan diet.

Selenium tips to take away

- Brazil nuts are a particularly rich plant-based source of selenium.
- Taking a supplement containing selenium is a reliable way of guaranteeing adequate intake.

Further information

You might be interested to check out the following webpages:

- [Nutrition overview](#) – comprehensive guidance to help you maintain a balanced and varied healthy diet.
- [Life stages](#) – detailed information on nutritional needs during pregnancy, breastfeeding, childhood, and other age groups.

References

1. British Dietetic Association (2020). One Blue Dot Nutritional considerations: Selenium. *One Blue Dot. A Practical Guidance for Dietitians*, <https://www.bda.uk.com/static/330c4d05-a2f0-4cbb-b6695612f9369d56/Practical-guide-nutritional-considerations-re-SELENIUM.pdf> (accessed April 16, 2026)
2. Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition (1991). *Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom* London: HMSO.
3. Rayman MP (2008). Food-chain Selenium and Human Health: Emphasis on Intake. *British Journal of Nutrition* **100**: 254–268
4. Thomson CD, Chisholm A, McLachlan SK & Campbell JM (2008). Brazil Nuts: an Effective Way to Improve Selenium Status. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* **87**: 379–384