

# Vitamin B12

## Why is vitamin B12 important?

Vitamin B12 is needed to help speed up chemical reactions in our bodies. Common symptoms and signs of a vitamin B12 deficiency include digestive problems, anaemia, a sore tongue, loss of appetite, muscle weakness, poor memory and an increased risk of nervous system damage.

Vitamin B12 is made by micro-organisms and is not produced by plants. Fortified foods and supplements are the only reliable sources of vitamin B12 for vegans. Be suspicious of any claims that this vitamin can be derived from plants.

## How much vitamin B12 do you need?

Your body can absorb vitamin B12 more efficiently in frequent small amounts, which is why the recommended intake for supplementation is much greater than the daily intake recommended for people relying on fortified foods. Compare your intake to The Vegan Society's guidelines on page two (see infographic). This will help to ensure that you are getting enough vitamin B12.

These amounts might seem like a lot compared with the daily intake of 1.5 mcg (microgram) recommended for adults in the UK.<sup>1</sup> However, these guidelines are safe and have been developed in line with the recommendations of public health authorities. No upper limit has been set for vitamin B12 intakes because no toxic effect has been identified.<sup>2</sup>

Guidelines for childhood are outlined in our information about different [life stages](#) available at [www.vegansociety.com/nutrition](http://www.vegansociety.com/nutrition).

## Which vegan foods contain Vitamin B12?

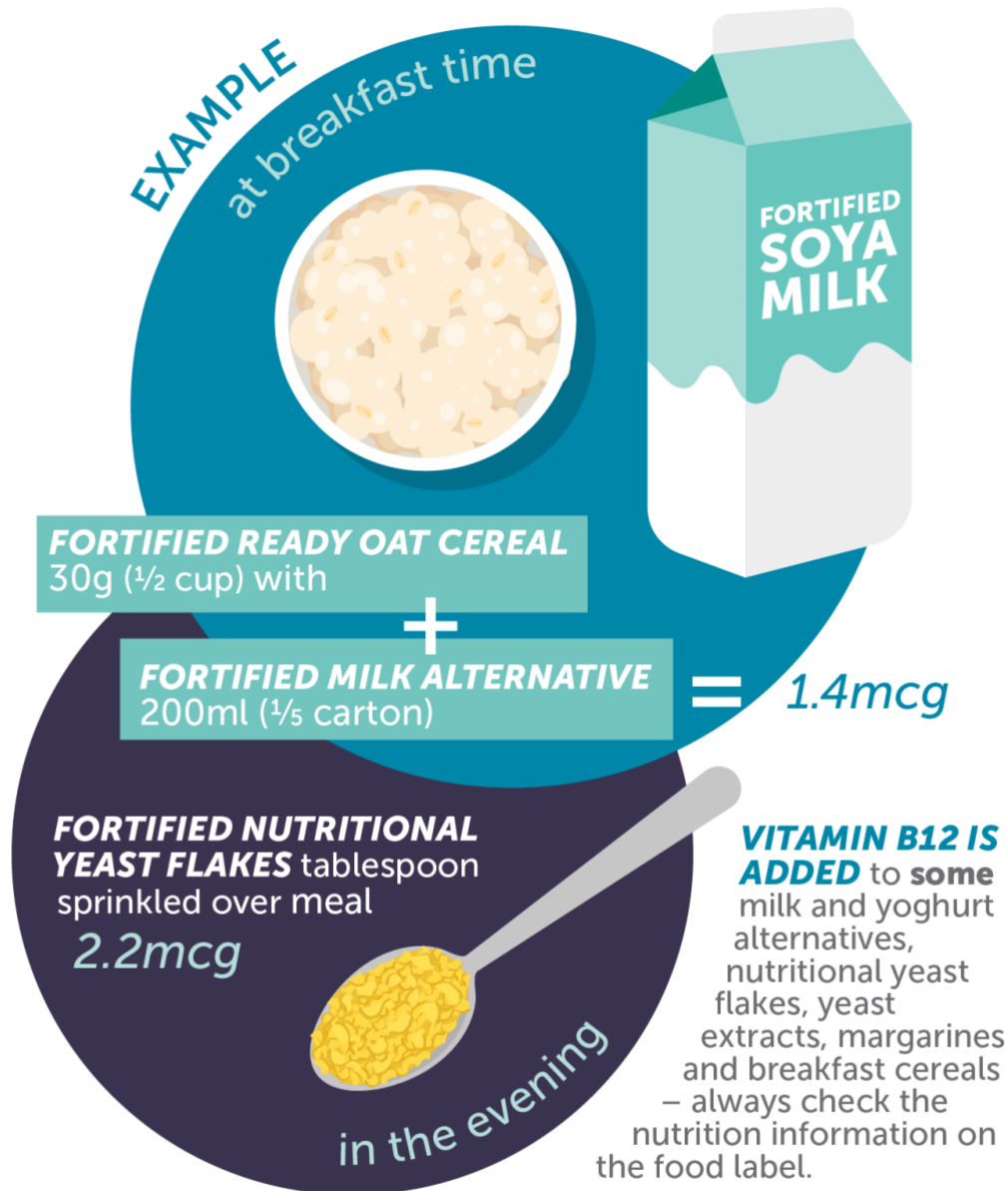
Fortified nutritional yeast is used by many vegans to increase their B12 intake and can be used in various vegan dishes. Fortified breakfast cereals, fortified plant milks, fortified plant spreads and yeast extracts are also sources of vitamin B12 for vegans.

## A note for people taking VEG 1

If you take The Vegan Society's VEG 1 supplement, you can increase the absorption of vitamin B12 by splitting the tablet into two and taking half with one meal and half with another meal at least four hours later. This approach enables you to match the higher end of Western omnivorous B12 levels. However, it is not essential to split the tablet, especially if you are consuming foods fortified with vitamin B12 across the day.

# VITAMIN B12

**IF YOU ARE RELYING ON FORTIFIED FOODS** for vitamin B12, consume them at least twice a day (at least four hours apart), aiming for a daily vitamin B12 intake of at least 3mcg (micrograms).



**IF YOU ARE RELYING ON A DAILY SUPPLEMENT**, ensure that it contains at least 10mcg of vitamin B12\*.

**IF YOU ARE RELYING ON A WEEKLY SUPPLEMENT**, ensure that it contains at least 2000mcg of vitamin B12\*.

\*Cyanocobalamin is the recommended type of vitamin B12.

## Which is the best type of vitamin B12?

You may notice that supplements contain different types of vitamin B12. Cyanocobalamin is the recommended form of vitamin B12 because it is the most stable, as well as economical, widely available and well researched. Your body converts cyanocobalamin into the two active forms of B12: methylcobalamin and adenosylcobalamin.

## Vitamin B12 tip to take away

Ensure that your vegan diet follows The Vegan Society guidelines about reliable vegan sources of vitamin B12, including fortified foods and/or taking a reliable supplement.

We recommend that you seek advice from a health professional if you think you may have a vitamin B12 deficiency.

## Further information

You might be interested to check out the following webpages at [www.vegansociety.com](http://www.vegansociety.com):

- [What every vegan should know about vitamin B12](#)
- [What's a safe source of vitamin B12?](#)
- [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. European Food Safety Authority Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition, and Allergies. *Scientific Opinion on Dietary Reference Values for Cobalamin (Vitamin B12)* 2015 <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2015.4150> (accessed 05 October 2023)