

Micronutrients: Small nutrients with a big impact

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Micronutrients are vitamins and minerals that the body needs in small amounts, but they play important roles in keeping you healthy.

The body needs 29 essential micronutrients daily. These include 13 vitamins (such as vitamin C and vitamin D) and 16 minerals (including iron, zinc and calcium). Micronutrients are called **essential** because the body cannot make them, so we must obtain them from food.

Each micronutrient plays a slightly different role in the body. Here are some examples:

- Vitamin B₁₂ helps keep the nerve cells healthy.
- Vitamin C helps the immune system work properly.
- Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium for strong bones.
- Iron helps make red blood cells.
- Potassium helps the heart function properly.

Micronutrients are different from macronutrients, which are carbohydrates, protein and fat. We need these macronutrients in larger amounts because they provide calories that fuel the body (macro = large). Micronutrients do not provide calories, and we need them in smaller amounts (micro = small). Micronutrients support many processes that allow the body to maintain normal function.

Plus, some micronutrients can act as antioxidants and may protect against cell damage associated with cancer and heart disease. Antioxidant micronutrients include vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium and zinc.

The good news? You don't need to count every milligram of every vitamin and mineral you consume. Keeping track of 29 different nutrients is difficult and time consuming. Instead, just focus on eating a balanced diet using the plate model:

- Half your plate: fruits and vegetables.
- One quarter: whole grains.
- One quarter: protein foods, such as fish, poultry, dairy, eggs and beans.

Eating a variety of foods across these groups naturally provides a wide range of micronutrients.



Nature on Your Mind

These days, many of us spend more time indoors and on screens than ever before.

Excess screen time is associated with eye strain, back pain and poor overall health from constant sitting. Maybe it's time to put down the phone and go outside for a walk.

Researchers have studied what happens to our minds and bodies when we are outdoors, and it is good news.

Hearing birds chirp, feeling the wind and noticing sunlight are linked to brain-boosting benefits and improved mood, according to the American Psychological Association.

One mechanism that might ease our stress is leaving the city for natural, untamed areas. Studies show that when we are in wild spaces, our sympathetic nervous system relaxes. This is the part of our nervous system that maintains our heart rate and blood pressure and blood sugar.

Researchers have found that people's bodies relaxed within five minutes of going outside. There is also evidence that getting outside helps with sleep. Some of the research seems to point to benefits for any length of time outdoors, so don't let a tight schedule keep you from an outdoor respite.

Green spaces, such as forests and fields, are beneficial outdoor spaces. But researchers also say it's helpful to go to blue spaces, which are outdoor spots located near water.

One theory for why nature is so powerful is that our ancestors learned to read the environment for signs of safety, and we are designed to connect.

Finding a few green spaces or water views can be beneficial, even if they are urban parks or waterfronts. Slow down, go outside and enjoy birds, sky and all the rest that nature has to offer.

Maybe it's time to put down the phone and go outside for a walk.



Rethinking 10K Steps

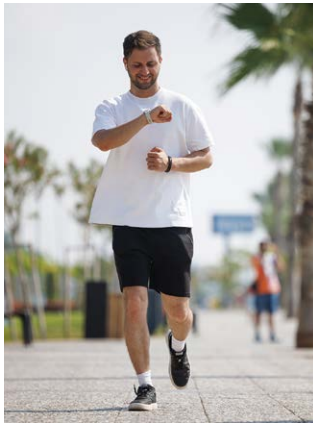
Do you need 10,000 steps a day to stay fit? Not at all. That number was created by one of the first pedometer manufacturers.

Research shows that if you walk fewer than 1,500 steps a day, you're more likely to be frail and weak and to fall. Steps are only one measurement of health and wellness. It's also important to include strength training, aerobics and balance activities, such as tai chi and yoga, to your physical activity routine.

General guidelines: People younger than 60 should try to walk 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day to achieve maximum fitness benefits that support life expectancy and cardiovascular health. But taking far fewer can still be beneficial, according to the Harvard School of Public Health. If you're older than 60, you may achieve a healthy benefit between 6,000 and 8,000 steps.

Tip: Try a pedometer. It's an easy, inexpensive way to get motivated. A mile walk is approximately 2,000 steps; 10,000 steps are nearly five miles.

Note: The number of steps and distance varies among individuals. The most important thing is to just walk.



Risks of Calcium Deficiency

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Calcium is an important mineral for overall health. It supports bones, helps muscles contract and helps blood clot normally. We need calcium from food daily, since the body cannot make it on its own.

Calcium requirements:

- Women 18-49 and men 18-69: 1,000 mg daily.
- Women 50+ and men 70+: 1,200 mg daily.

Dairy products, such as milk, yogurt and cheese, are great sources of calcium. Many plant-based drinks, such as soy, oat and almond milk, are fortified with calcium. Some calcium is also found in broccoli, almonds and fish canned with their bones, such as sardines and salmon.

What happens if you don't get enough calcium? If the body does not get enough calcium, over time it begins to leach calcium from the bones to maintain normal body functions. This can weaken bones and increase the risk of fractures.

Long-term calcium deficiency can lead to osteoporosis, a condition where bones become fragile and break more

easily. Osteoporosis often develops silently with no early symptoms. You may not realize you have it until a bone breaks.



Combat osteoporosis with weight-bearing exercise (e.g., walking daily) and getting enough of the nutrients required for bone health: calcium, vitamin D, protein, magnesium and vitamin K.

Food versus supplements? Try to get calcium from food and drinks before turning to supplements. Food provides other helpful nutrients that improve calcium absorption. Use supplements when you can't get enough calcium from food, but talk to your health care provider about the right dose. Too much is linked to kidney stones and heart problems.

How to Stop Overthinking

By Eric Endlich, PhD

If you ever feel stuck when you need to make a decision or get started on a project, you're probably familiar with overthinking. Overthinking can lead you to replay past events as well, wondering if you said or did the right thing.

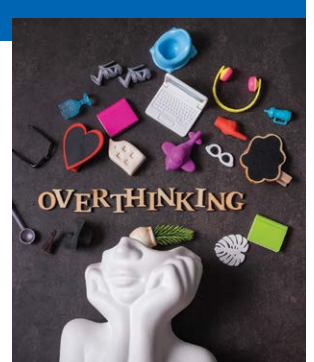
Overthinking — repeatedly running through scenarios in your mind — can spring from a number of causes:

- Fear that you'll make the wrong choice and be judged by others.
- Desire to make the perfect decision that you won't regret.
- Memories of past experiences that ended badly.
- Being in an environment that discourages risk-taking.

Being paralyzed by inaction can waste time and energy, lead you to doubt yourself and cause you to miss deadlines or opportunities.

To break this pattern, try strategies such as:

- Noticing when you're mentally replaying situations repeatedly.
- Committing to moving on or making a decision by a specific time.
- Focusing on steps you need to take now; you can address future decisions as the need arises.
- Considering possible positive outcomes instead of contemplating worst-case what-if outcomes.
- Recognizing that our actions are never perfect, and you'll learn something useful regardless of how things turn out.
- Reminding yourself that you've done many things successfully in the past, and you can continue to improve with experience.



It may require effort to change these mental habits, but you'll be rewarded with more time and energy to focus on the things you really care about.



Smart Moves Toolkit: personalbest.com/extras/26V8tools. Printable download: [The Post-Vacation Slump](#).

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