



The Menen Centre For Optimum Health Oakville and Toronto

Last In The Alphabet, But One Of The Most Essential Minerals – Zinc

One of the most essential minerals to have in the diet would have to be Zinc. It has an extensive range of functions and effects within the body but not only does too little create challenges, too much can also have a negative impact on your health.

Among some of the most important functions of Zinc in the body are:

- Protein and fat synthesis (tissue building)
- Collagen formation (tissue structure)
- Maintains prostate gland and reproductive organ health
- Needed for vision, smell & taste
- Required for wound healing
- Supports functioning of the immune system
- Protects the liver from chemical damage
- Protects the body from heavy metal toxicity
- Is required for bone formation
- Involved in the synthesis, secretion and utilization of insulin (blood sugar regulation)
- Has antioxidant properties
- Maintains proper vitamin E levels in the body and helps improve absorption of vitamin A

The best dietary sources of Zinc include oysters, beef, turkey, Swiss chard, lima beans, rolled oats, pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds.

Among the first signs of a Zinc deficiency is a reduced sense of smell and/or taste. Other signs include weakening of the nails, white spots appearing on the nails, hair loss, a delay in wound healing, reduced growth in children and mild anemic symptoms (most notably fatigue).

When taking Zinc as a supplement, it should be noted that its absorption decreases if taken with fibre, if taken with supplemental iron or if taken with either grains or legumes/beans (substances called 'phytates' in grains and legumes prevents Zinc from being absorbed).

It should also be noted that taking too much Zinc could have negative effects. An excess amount of Zinc can reduce immune function, can cause stomach upset and can also cause a deficiency of Copper in the body as well as a deficiency in Folic Acid. According to studies published in *The Journal Of Nutrition* (132:697-702, 2002) and *The Journal Of The American College Of Nutrition* (vol 25, no4, 285-291, 2006) it has also been suggested that cholesterol levels are affected by the levels of Zinc found in the body and that too much Zinc can cause a drop in the body's good cholesterol, HDL. Both publications also indicated that further studies are required. It does appear, however, that a careful balance must be achieved with Zinc dosage, especially in individuals who may have difficulty controlling cholesterol. Always check with a licensed professional, whether a Naturopathic Doctor, Medical Doctor or Nutritionist, as to what the proper amount of Zinc is for you.

**--Naturopathically yours, Dr. Jeff Appelman, BSc, ND
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