

# What about Zinc?

By Allison Tannis, MSc.

Just because the alphabet ends in z, does not mean it's appropriate to leave zinc, such an important mineral, to the end of your supplement regime. And, today there is more to know about zinc than you may think.

Zinc is an essential mineral that is found in almost every cell of the body. Involved in the proper functioning of approximately 100 enzymes, zinc is a key component in a healthy body. More specifically, zinc supports a healthy immune system, is involved in DNA synthesis, is required for proper wound healing and, the ability to taste and smell. Perhaps the most important tid-bit to remember about zinc is that its required for the development and activation of T-lymphocytes, a kind of white blood cell that helps fight infection. (*American Journal of Physiology, June 1997*) Therefore, ensuring adequate levels of zinc in the body can help stave off the common cold and make sure wounds heal quickly.

Where do you find it? Zinc is found in a wide variety of foods. Next time you're looking in the fridge reach for whole grains, nuts, beans, oysters, poultry or red meat to find some zinc. But, do you know if you're getting enough? Those who do not have a diet high in animal protein, may not be absorbing enough zinc as phytates in whole grains and legumes can decrease zinc absorption. (*Int J Food Sci Nutr, November 1995*)

Do I need a little zinc in my life? You're at risk of having a zinc deficiency if you have inadequate caloric intake, digestive disease, are pregnancy, a vegetarian, an alcoholic or eat a lot of iron. Iron consumption is a problem as many of our foods are fortified with iron in an attempt to address iron deficiency anemia, a serious public health problem. As researchers have found that large amounts of iron in supplements (greater than 25mg) effects zinc absorption when tested in solutions, the amount of iron we eat is worth considering. (*Am J Clin Nutr November 1998*) Of note, this interaction can be avoided by taking iron supplements between meals.

## Signs of zinc deficiency:

hair loss	loss of appetite
diarrhea	eye and skin lesions
delayed sexual maturation	impotence
growth retardation	

What is an adequate level of zinc? The Dietary Reference Intake, (DRI) for zinc is 11mg for adult men and 8mg for adult women.

## Zinc in the News:

Scientists have found out so many more things about zinc than we've discussed thus far. Let's investigate some of these enlivening scientific discoveries about zinc.

- zinc supplementation (10mg/day) reduces the incidence of pneumonia by 41% in children. (*British Medical Journal, June 2002*).
- zinc supplementation reduces the incidence of diarrhea in children. (*J Trace Elem Med Biol., June 1997*)
- patients with pressure ulcers experienced significant improvement with a supplement that included zinc (*J Wound Care, September 2004*)

For proper growth and development, a healthy body, and the ability to fight disease don't let zinc be last on your alphabet of supplements. Zinc for health – it's elemental!

Allison Tannis, BSc., MSc. is a nutritional educator and author of *Vitality: Quest for a healthy diet*. Visit [www.allisontannis.com](http://www.allisontannis.com) for more information, articles and upcoming appearances.