

After Bariatric Surgery: Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

After bariatric surgery, you are at risk for low blood levels of vitamins and minerals. This is because you may:

- be eating a smaller amount of food.
- not be able to eat certain foods or textures.
- have less vitamins and minerals being absorbed by your body after surgery.
- have other health problems or take certain medicines.

For these reasons, it may be hard to get all the vitamins and minerals you need each day from only food. Everyone who has had bariatric surgery will be asked to take vitamin and mineral supplements to help prevent low levels in the body.

How do I know if I am low?

You may not see or feel signs of low vitamin or mineral levels (deficiency) until the levels in your body are very low.

It's important to see your doctor or dietitian and have blood tests done as they recommend. If your levels are low, your doctor or dietitian will talk to you about which supplements and how much is best for you.

More is not better

Taking higher amounts of vitamins and minerals is not better. Getting too many vitamins and minerals from supplements or fortified foods can make you sick or even poison you.

Remember that many foods (like vitamin waters, drinks, and energy bars) have vitamins and minerals added to them. Check the Nutrition Facts tables to find out how much.

How do I choose a good vitamin and mineral supplement?

Ask a pharmacist which vitamin and mineral supplements are good choices. Store brands or generic supplements are fine to use.

Buy only supplements that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN) or Natural Product Number (NPN) on the label. This means that Health Canada has approved the product.

What format should I take?

For the first few weeks after your surgery, while you are healing, you may have discomfort or vomiting if you take large tablets. You can crush large multivitamin/mineral tablets and mix them with applesauce to make them easy to swallow.

Other formats below may be easier to take:

- tablets you can chew (chewable)
- tablets that dissolve under your tongue (sublingual)
- fast-dissolve strips that melt on your tongue
- liquids or drops
- oral spray

Avoid soft chews, gummies, or patches. They may not have all the vitamins and minerals you need. Soft chews and gummies may also stick and block the opening of the pouch, causing discomfort or vomiting.

After the first few weeks, when you feel ready, you can take larger tablets, such as multivitamin/minerals and calcium.

What do I need?

Your vitamin and mineral needs depend on the type of surgery you had, your age, sex, health, and the medicines you take. It also depends on whether you had low levels before or after surgery. Your needs may change over time.

Your doctor, dietitian, or pharmacist can tell you which supplements are right for you after surgery.

My daily recommendations:

Adult multivitamin/mineral supplement with iron and folate:

Vitamin B₁ (Thiamine): 100 mg

Vitamin B₁₂: _____ mcg

Choose sublingual tablets, fast-dissolve strips, or spray.

Vitamin D: _____ units

Calcium citrate: _____ mg

Other:

Iron: _____

Notes:

Bring your vitamin and mineral supplements to your next dietitian visit.

When should I take my supplements?

- You will need to take your supplements a few times each day instead of all at once.

Spreading your supplements over the day can help your body use the nutrients and will avoid overfilling your small pouch or sleeve.

- Calcium is best absorbed in smaller doses. **Take no more than 600 mg of elemental calcium at one time.** You will need to take it a few times a day.
- Choose calcium citrate as it is better absorbed after surgery than other types of calcium.
- Don't take calcium within 2 hours of taking supplements with iron.
- Some supplements need to be taken at different times than your medicine. Your doctor or pharmacist can tell you the best times of the day to take your medicine and supplements.

Always drink some fluid, like water, when you take your supplement to help you swallow it. You can take your supplements with or without food. But, try to take them before you eat, so that you don't need to drink at meals.

Safety and storage

- Always keep vitamin and mineral supplements out of children's reach. Take special care with iron, because too much iron is toxic.
- Check the expiry date on the bottle. Don't take pills that are past the expiry date.
- Read labels to make sure you aren't allergic to any of the ingredients – ask your pharmacist if you're not sure.