

# Are you Deficient?

**N**ever ignore minor problems with your hair, skin, mouth, teeth or joints or recurrent colds and infections. Your body is trying to tell you something! Naturopath **Caroline Robertson** explains how to translate your body's language and address deficiencies before disease sets in.



## Common deficiency symptoms of vitamins and minerals

Nutrient	Deficiency signs
Folic acid	Fatigue, feeling faint, breathless, headache, heart palpitations, trouble concentrating, loss of appetite, red swollen shiny tongue, change in bowel patterns, megaloblastic anaemia.
Iron	Tiredness, pale skin, breathless, weakness, dizzy, low appetite, poor concentration, cold hands and feet, brittle nails, cracks at corners of mouth, frequent infections. Iron-deficiency anaemia can lead to unusual cravings for nonfood items such as ice, dirt or paint. It may also lead to restless legs syndrome. Menstruating women are at higher risk.
Magnesium	Mild deficiency leads to muscle cramps, nausea, poor sleep or insomnia, irritability, headaches, anxiety and fatigue. More severe deficiency leads to coldness in extremities, heart arrhythmias, numbness, tingling and even heart attacks as the coronary arteries constrict.
Vitamin B12	Mild deficiency leads to weakness, fatigue, light headedness, constipation or diarrhoea, rapid heartbeat and breathing, pale skin, sore tongue, weight loss and reduced appetite. Severe lack leads to memory loss, tingling/numbness in extremities, difficulty walking, confusion and depression.
Vitamin C	Easy bruising, bleeding gums, tiredness, dry hair and skin, muscle and joint pain, poor healing wounds, tooth loss, trouble fighting infections, rapid mood changes and irritability. Smokers and diabetics have increased requirements.
Vitamin D	General muscle pain and weakness, psoriasis, gum disease, joint pain, headache, poor concentration, severe asthma in children, frequent falls in the elderly and frequent infections. Those with reduced sun exposure, dark skinned people, those suffering kidney or liver disease all have increased requirements.
Zinc	Recurrent infections, poor wound healing, male impotence, hair loss, dandruff, white spots on nails, no sense of taste, acne, back weakness, delayed development in infants and adolescents, hyperactivity.

Note: if you experience any symptoms listed above, you should discuss these with your healthcare practitioner before commencing a supplementation course.

### Deficiency denial:

“But I get everything from my healthy diet,” is a common response from patients after I see signs of nutritional deficits. But even with ideal meals, you can suffer deficiencies due to nutrient leached soil from modern farming, artificial ripening, irradiation, food processing, poor digestion, overcooking, prolonged storage and absorption inhibitors such as pharmaceutical drugs, infections and illnesses. Also anti-nutrients such as alcohol, caffeine and phytates which are high in grains, bind nutrients out of the body. Increased requirements during stress, disease, youth, adolescence, pregnancy, breastfeeding and old age may not be met through diet. Common high calorie, low nutrient diets or insufficient intake are other factors.

### Deficiencies and diseases

As the saying goes, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. A concept which is being taken more seriously today than ever before, for example there is an increasing number of pregnant women taking folic acid to prevent birth defects. While your body can make some vitamins such as vitamins A, D and K, it can't make minerals so must rely on dietary intake. This is where a problem

may arise, particularly if you have digestive weakness or are not sure how your food has been processed. Supplementing can ensure minor deficiencies don't develop into major diseases.

The following list of symptoms may result from minor deficiencies which can be corrected with the right supplements or super foods:

#### Hairy tales

Hair loss or greying hair has been linked to low vitamin B5, B6 and B12, biotin, iron and protein. Dry hair and scalp can indicate poor vitamin A or essential fatty acid (EFA) stores. Feed your follicles with high iron black strap molasses, vitamin B rich tempeh, protein packed eggs and omega-3 dripping flax seed oil.

#### Mouth messages

Cuts at the corners of your mouth may indicate vitamins C, B2, B6 or folic acid deficiency. A burning tongue can indicate low vitamin B complex. Bleeding gums can signify low vitamin C and mouth ulcers are helped with vitamin B6, zinc and an alkalising diet. For cracks at corners of mouth or a swollen or fissured tongue try liquid vitamin B complex.

#### Nail news

Brittle nails with white spots often arise when zinc is lacking. Peeling or ridged nails can come from low vitamin A, protein and calcium. Soft nails may be a magnesium or sometimes a silica deficiency.

#### Skin signs

Dry skin (including eczema) is helped by essential fatty acids (EFAs) and vitamin E try evening primrose oil or flax oil supplements. Easy bruising is often related to deficiencies of vitamin C and bioflavonoids. Acne is aggravated by low zinc (particularly in pubescent boys) and vitamin A.

#### Eye see

An array of eye disorders arise from vitamin A insufficiency. Colour blindness, poor vision, conjunctivitis, dry eyes, macular degeneration, night blindness and red eyes are all connected with low vitamin A. If you have macular degeneration or floaters in your eyes, vitamins C, E and bioflavonoids are invaluable. Vitamin B2 is another one to consider with itchy, burning, red, sandy eyes. Eyelid tics can be subdued with sufficient zinc and magnesium.

#### Listen to your ears

Recent research presented at the 2013 Inter-science Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy revealed that vitamin D deficiency increases the incidence of ear infections. Inner ear issues such as tinnitus and vertigo can arise from insufficient iron, vitamins B12 and D and calcium.

#### Nutritional health insurance

Far from just causing expensive urine, supplementing can safeguard against deficiencies, preventing them from causing chronic conditions. Even cancer has been linked to low levels of vitamin D according to Dr John Cannell who says “50,000-63,000 individuals in the United States and 19,000-25,000 in the UK die prematurely from cancer annually due to insufficient vitamin D.” As many as one in three Australians suffer with vitamin D deficiency. In Queensland research revealed 40.5 per cent of subjects have low vitamin D blood levels.

Other deficiencies common in Australia are vitamins C, B12, folic acid, iron, magnesium, zinc and selenium. Monitor your levels by being aware of the shortage signs and if supplementing stick to the recommended dosage.

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