

Untreated Vitamin B12 Deficiency

Can Lead to Serious Medical Complications

A deficiency of vitamin B12 can lead to many serious health problems, according to research conducted for the American Society of Aging.

Symptoms include fatigue, weakness, numbness, prickling, or tingling in the extremities, loss of muscular coordination, sore tongue, appetite loss, weight loss, AND forgetfulness. If left untreated, permanent neurological damage can result, including dementia, disorientation, confusion, agitation, irritability, dimmed vision, delusions, or hallucinations.

Vitamin B12 is essential for the:

- **growth and repair of body cells**
- **development and maintenance of normal nervous system function**
- **formation of red blood cells**

It is normally obtained from eating animal products, such as meats, fish, eggs, and dairy products and absorbed from the small intestine. Except in strict vegetarians, dietary deficiency is rare. Most vitamin B12 deficiency results from malabsorption caused by the insufficiency of a necessary stomach secretion and by disorders of the small intestine. When this occurs, dietary or oral B12 supplements are simply not absorbed by the body.

As we age, our stomachs produce less acid, which can also lead to a vitamin B12 deficiency. Nutrition researchers now believe that as many as 1 in 5 Americans over the age of 65 are vitamin B12 deficient.

In addition to the older adults, other high risk groups include persons:

- **who have had a stomach or small intestine resection**
- **are living with HIV/AIDS**
- **who have Crohn's disease**
- **who have pernicious anemia**
- **who are taking proton pump inhibitors or H2 blockers over a long period of time.**

Your doctor can perform tests to determine if vitamin B12 deficiency is a problem. Once identified, vitamin B12 injections, which get it directly in the bloodstream, are necessary since the deficiency is the result of an inability of the body to absorb the vitamin from foods or oral supplements. Standard monthly vitamin B12 injections may be self-administered, but most people don't feel comfortable giving themselves or their family injections.

Normally, those identified with this health threat have had to schedule monthly visits to their doctors to receive their injections. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has, however, now approved another method, which is convenient for use at home and doesn't require an injection. Vitamin B12 now comes in the form of a gel to be placed inside of the nose and is self-administered once a week.

If you suspect that you might be suffering from a vitamin B12 deficiency, it is a serious health threat and you should contact your doctor immediately for testing.

If you are currently being treated for B12 deficiency by monthly injections, you might want to ask your doctor about the new intranasal gel alternative.

The information for this article was provided by the American Society on Aging.

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