

MINERALS

Have you ever notice how TV commercials for breakfast cereal always mention vitamins and **minerals**? But when you think of minerals, food isn't the first thing that comes to mind. Aren't minerals something you find in the earth, like iron and quartz? Well, yes, but small amounts of some minerals are also in foods. For instance, red meat, such as beef, is a good source of iron.

Just like vitamins, minerals help your body grow, develop, and stay healthy. The body uses minerals to perform many different functions - from building strong bones to transmitting nerve messages. Some minerals are even used to make hormones or maintain a normal heartbeat.

Macro and Trace

There are two kinds of minerals: **macrominerals** and **trace minerals**. Macro means "large" in Greek (and your body needs **larger** amounts of macrominerals than trace minerals). The macromineral group is made up of calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, sodium, potassium, chloride, and sulfur. A trace of something means that there is only a little of it. So even though your body needs trace minerals, it needs just a tiny bit of each one. Scientists aren't even sure how much of these minerals you need each day. Trace minerals includes iron, manganese, copper, iodine, zinc, cobalt, fluoride, and selenium. Let's take a closer look at some of the minerals you get from food.

Calcium

Calcium is the top macromineral when it comes to your bones. This mineral helps build strong bones, so you can do everything from standing up straight to scoring that winning goal. It also helps build strong, healthy teeth, for chomping on tasty food.

Which foods are rich in calcium?

- dairy products, such as milk, cheese, and yogurt
- canned salmon and sardines with bones
- leafy green vegetables, such as broccoli
- calcium-fortified foods - from orange juice to cereals and crackers

Iron

The body needs iron to transport oxygen from your lungs to the rest of your body. Your entire body needs oxygen to stay healthy and alive. Iron helps because it's important in the formation of hemoglobin which is the part of your red blood cells that carries oxygen throughout the body.

Which foods are rich in iron?

- meat, especially red meat, such as beef
- tuna and salmon
- eggs
- beans
- baked potato with skins
- dried fruits, like raisins
- leafy green vegetables, such as broccoli
- whole and enriched grains, like wheat or oats

Potassium

Potassium keeps your muscles and nervous system working properly. Did you know your blood and body tissues, such as muscles, contain water? They do, and potassium helps make sure the amount of water is just right.

Which foods are rich in potassium?

- bananas
- broccoli
- tomatoes
- potatoes with skins
- leafy green vegetables, such as broccoli
- citrus fruits, like oranges
- dried fruits
- legumes, such as beans, peas, lentils, and peanuts

Zinc

Zinc helps your immune system, which is your body's system for fighting off illnesses and infections. It also helps with cell growth and helps heal wounds, such as cuts.

Which foods are rich in zinc?

- beef
- pork
- lamb
- legumes, such as beans, peas, lentils, and peanuts

When people don't get enough of these important minerals, they can have health problems. For instance, too little calcium - especially when you're a kid - can lead to weaker bones. Some kids may take mineral supplements, but most kids don't need them if they eat a nutritious diet. So eat those minerals and stay healthy!