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Media release

Health issues associated with Vitamin B6 deficiency

If American research is any guide to the health of Australians, chances are our population is low on vitamin B6.

Many US citizens may be low on vitamin B6, as evidenced by plasma levels of *pyridoxal 5 phosphate* measured over 600 people, which is an indicator of B6 adequacy.

Those believed to be at higher risk of low plasma levels are smokers, oral contraceptive users and the elderly.

According to Australian Accredited Nutritionist, Glenn Cardwell, "Vitamin B6 intake needs increase with age and during pregnancy and lactation.

"Vitamin B6 was not measured in the last National Nutrition Survey, so it is difficult to know how much B6 Australians consume.

"We know that excess B6 from supplements can be a problem, which was last seen in the 1980s when women took large doses of vitamin B6 for pre-menstrual tension (PMT).

"However, taking adequate B6 naturally from food is the way to get enough of a 'natural' amount of B6 without the symptoms of excess, and possibly the best source is bananas," says Cardwell.

The banana is an ideal fruit for the elderly as it is soft and easy to eat. It provides many other benefits too with its potassium (blood pressure), vitamin C, modest folate and a GI that will not adversely affect blood sugar levels.

"B6 helps with the production of neurotransmitters in the brain and amino acids that are made into body proteins. Vitamin B6 is also essential for the production of haemoglobin, the protein that transports oxygen to every body cell".

"Insufficient B6 has been linked to a greater risk of cancer and the increased formation of *homocysteine*, high levels of which can cause heart disease.

As we get older, our need for vitamin B6 increases - Australian government tables show we need about 20% more B6 after we turn 50.

As this vitamin is readily lost in the urine, it must be taken regularly to ensure an adequate intake. Anybody on a very high protein diet or drinking alcohol will need more B6 in their diet.

"With quality bananas plentiful and a value for money proposition, they are a great healthy energy snack and naturally high in vitamin B6," Cardwell says.

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