

Vitamin B12

Information for patients

This leaflet is for people who have low vitamin B12 levels, may benefit from self-care, or may no longer need vitamin B12 injections.

What is vitamin B12?

Vitamin B12 is a vitamin your body needs to stay healthy. It helps to:

- Keep your nerves healthy
- Support memory and concentration
- Make red blood cells

If your vitamin B12 level is low, you may:

- Feel very tired or weak
- Very low vitamin B12 levels can sometimes cause nerve problems.

What causes low vitamin B12?

Some people do not get enough vitamin B12 from their diet.

If your low vitamin B12 is caused by your diet, you may be able to improve your levels by eating more foods that contain vitamin B12.

Good sources of vitamin B12 include:

- Meat
- Fish and shellfish
- Milk, cheese and yoghurt
- Eggs

Vegan foods with added vitamin B12:

- Oat, soya and rice milks
- Breakfast cereals
- Marmite
- Fortified soya yoghurts and spreads



You can also buy vitamin B12 tablets from pharmacies and supermarkets.

When is treatment needed?

Some people can't absorb vitamin B12 properly from food or tablets. These people may need treatment from the NHS. This can happen if you:

- Have had stomach or bowel surgery
- Have inflammatory bowel disease
- Have a condition like pernicious anaemia
- Take certain medicines for a long time, such as metformin or acid tablets

Treatment options

Vitamin B12 tablets work well if your body can absorb the vitamin properly. These can usually be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or supermarket.

Vitamin B12 injections are given at your GP surgery. They are usually only needed if you have pernicious anaemia or your body cannot absorb vitamin B12 properly.

Why is my GP stopping vitamin B12 injections?

Vitamin B12 injections should only be given when tablets or changes to your diet are unlikely to work. Many people are having injections when they may no longer need them or when self-care may be a better option.

If your body can absorb vitamin B12 normally, tablets or diet changes are often enough to keep your levels healthy.

Do I need a blood test?

- Healthy people do not usually need a vitamin B12 blood test.
- Your GP may suggest a blood test in some situations.
- Most people do not need regular blood tests once treatment has started.
- Your doctor may review you if your symptoms do not get better.

When should I get help?

Speak to your GP practice or pharmacist if your symptoms change. They can advise on the best treatment for you.