

SPECIAL Vitamins as Food Supplements

Imprint

BfR Consumer Monitor 2021 | Special Vitamins as Food Supplements

Publisher: German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR)
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Photo: Marta Ortiz/iStockphoto

Layout/Realisation: tangram documents GmbH, Rostock

Print: Pinguin Druck GmbH, Berlin

Translation: KERN AG, Frankfurt am Main

As of: November 2021

Use of the results published here is possible with mention of the source “BfR Consumer Monitor 2021 | Special Vitamins as Food Supplements”.

This text version is a translation of the original German text which is the only legally binding version.

ISBN 978-3-948484-42-2

Foreword


Dear Readers,
Vitamins are essential for human life. They are involved in numerous metabolic processes, are crucial for the immune system and promote, among other things, the development of cells, bones and teeth. By having a balanced and varied diet, a healthy person can get almost all vitamins in sufficient quantities.

Nevertheless, the market for vitamins in the form of food supplements is growing continuously. The diverse range of tablets, capsules and liquids give the impression that a sufficient vitamin intake is not possible from diet alone. However, in most cases taking vitamins via food supplements is not useful. On the contrary: Taking high-dose food supplements in addition to a balanced diet increases the risk of an oversupply of the respective vitamins.

The BfR commissioned a nationwide survey to find out how important the population thinks food supplements are in order to cover vitamin needs, how often they are consumed and how the population rates the benefits and health risks. The results of the survey can be found in this special issue of the BfR Consumer Monitor.



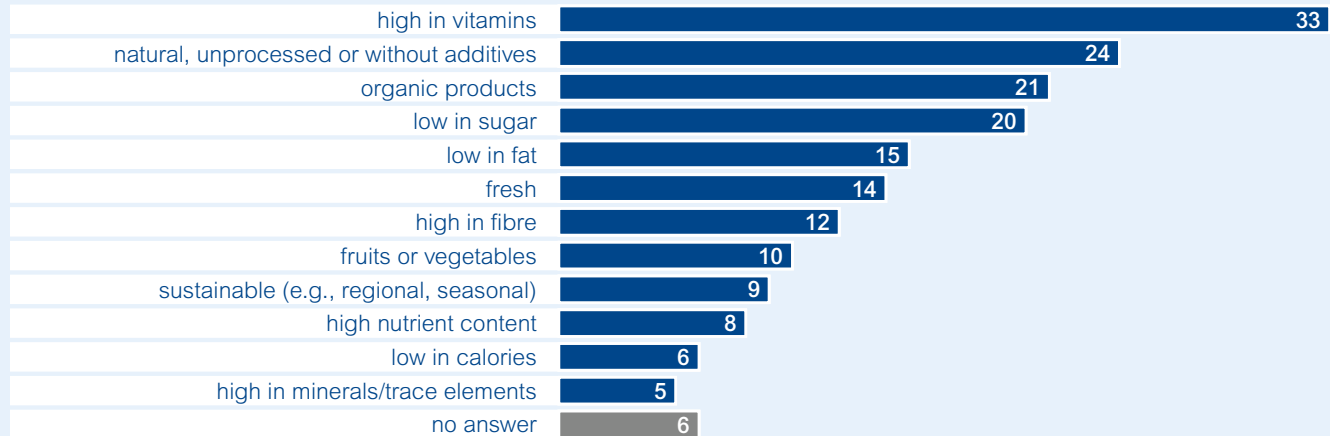
Professor Dr. Dr. Andreas Hensel
President German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR)



What do you think are typical characteristics of foods that are generally considered healthy?

You can name up to three characteristics.

Characteristics of healthy foods



Mentions without predefined response options

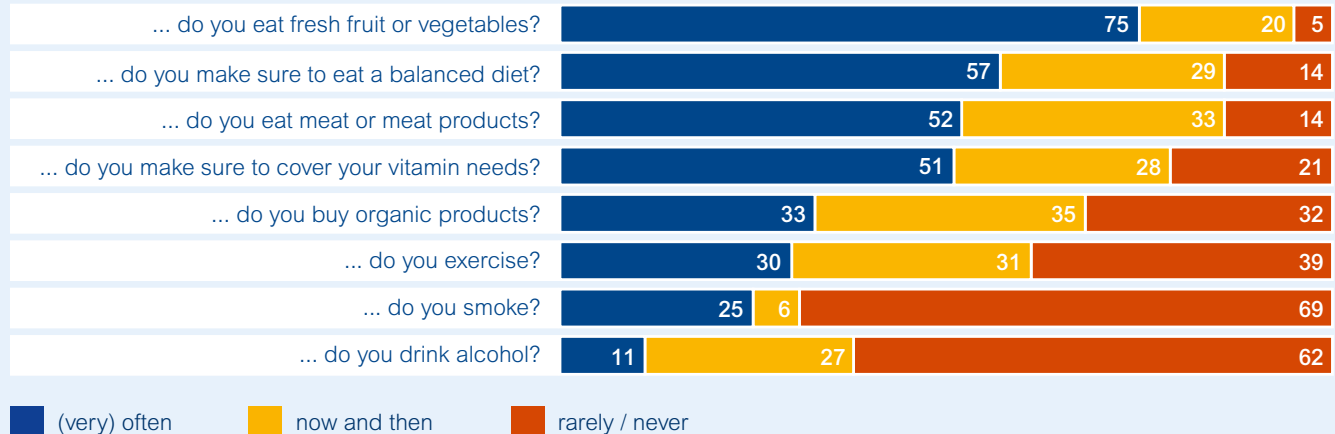
Shown: characteristics that were spontaneously mentioned by at least 5 percent of respondents

Basis: 1,023 respondents; Figures given in percentages



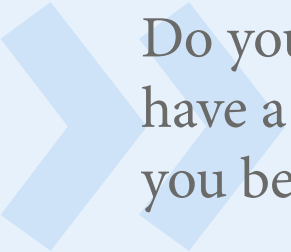
How often ...

Health-conscious behaviour



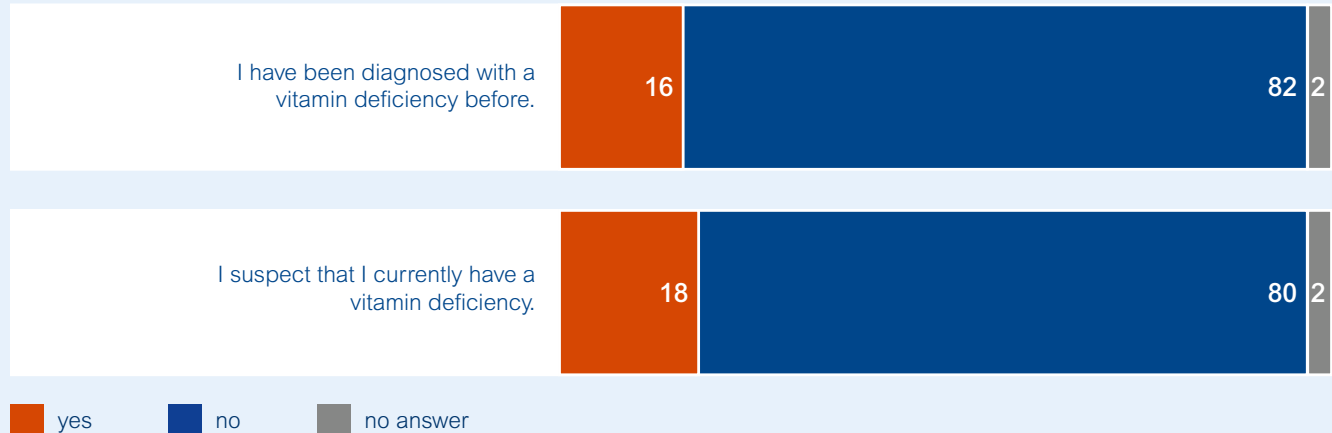
Response options: "never", "rarely", "now and then", "often", "very often"

Basis: 1,023 respondents; Figures given in percentages




Do you currently suspect that you have a vitamin deficiency or have you been diagnosed with one before?

Diagnosed or suspected vitamin deficiency



Single choice

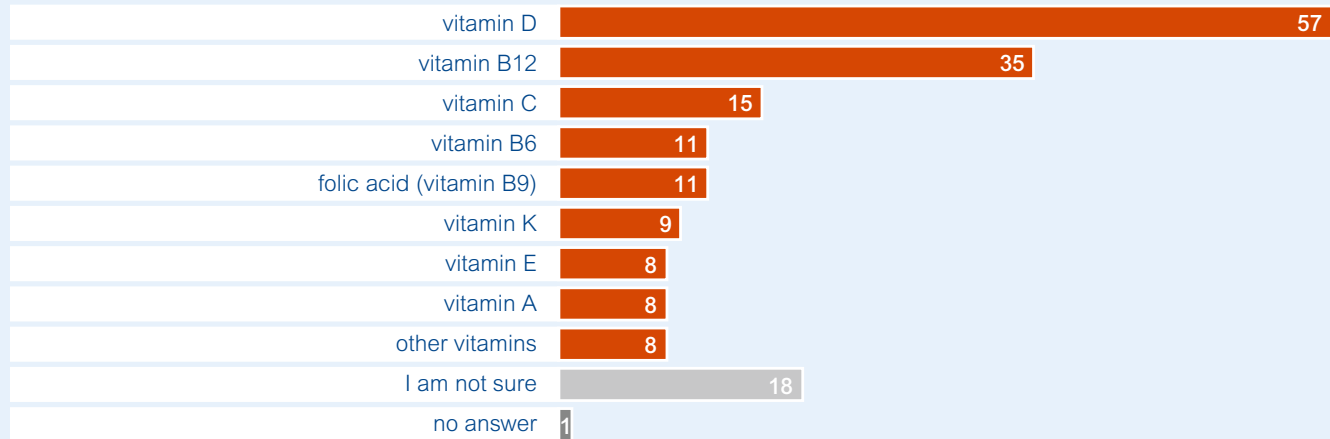
Basis: 1,023 respondents; Figures given in percentages



For which of the following vitamins have you already been diagnosed with a deficiency / do you currently suspect a deficiency?


Please select all that apply.

Diagnosed or suspected vitamin deficiency: Specification



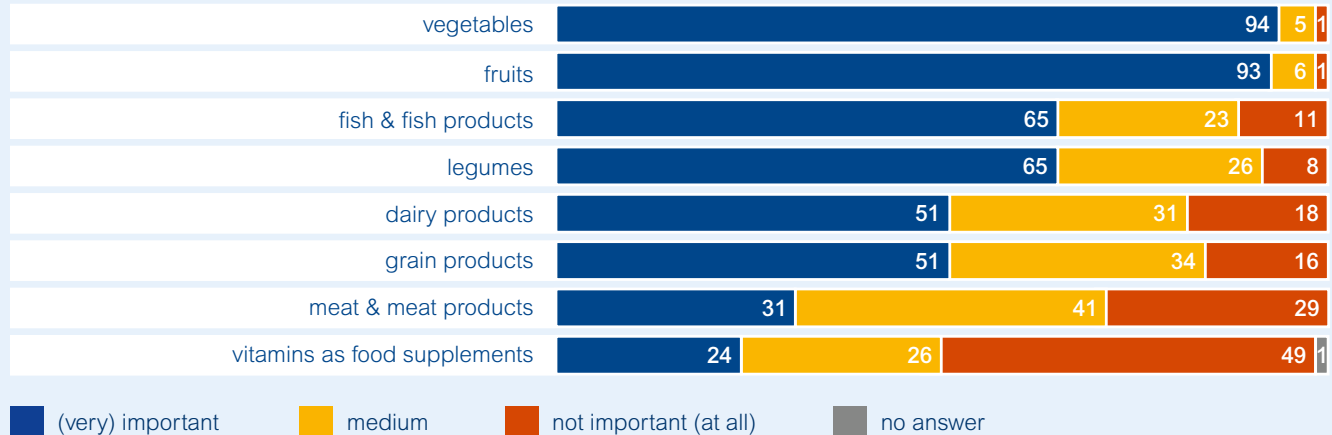
Multiple choice

Basis: 271 respondents with diagnosed or suspected vitamin deficiency; Figures given in percentages




What do you think: How important are the following products to cover the vitamin needs of the human body?

Foods for the intake of vitamins



Response scale: 1 "not important at all" to 5 "very important"

Basis: 1,023 respondents; Figures given in percentages



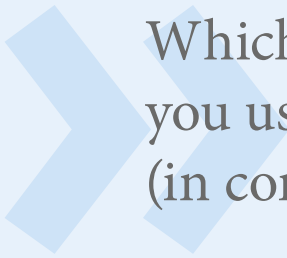
How often do you usually take vitamins
via food supplements (in concentrated form)?

Frequency of consumption of vitamins via food supplements



Single choice

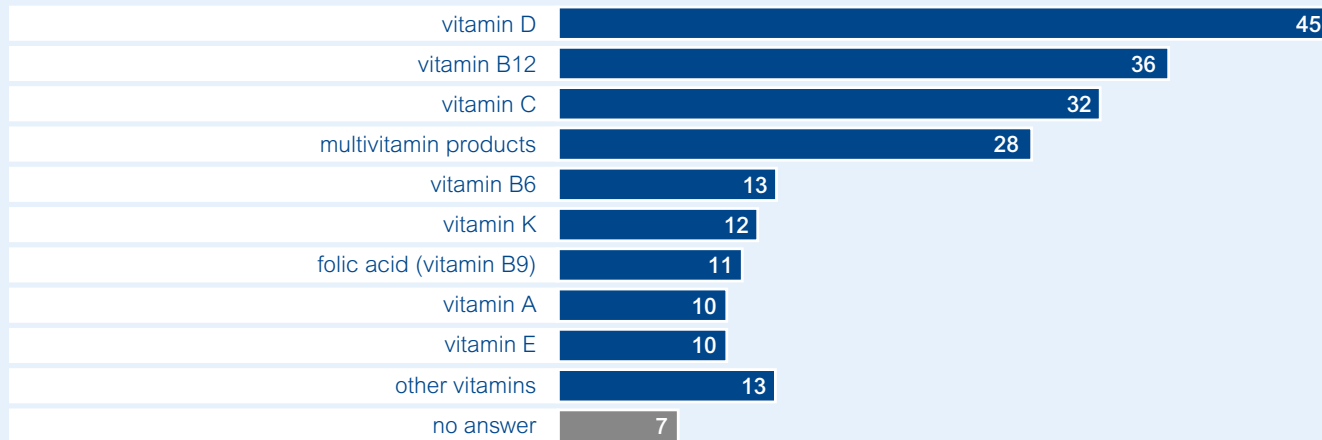
Basis: 1,023 respondents; Figures given in percentages



Which of the following vitamins do you usually take via food supplements (in concentrated form)?


Please select all that apply.

Consumed vitamins via food supplements



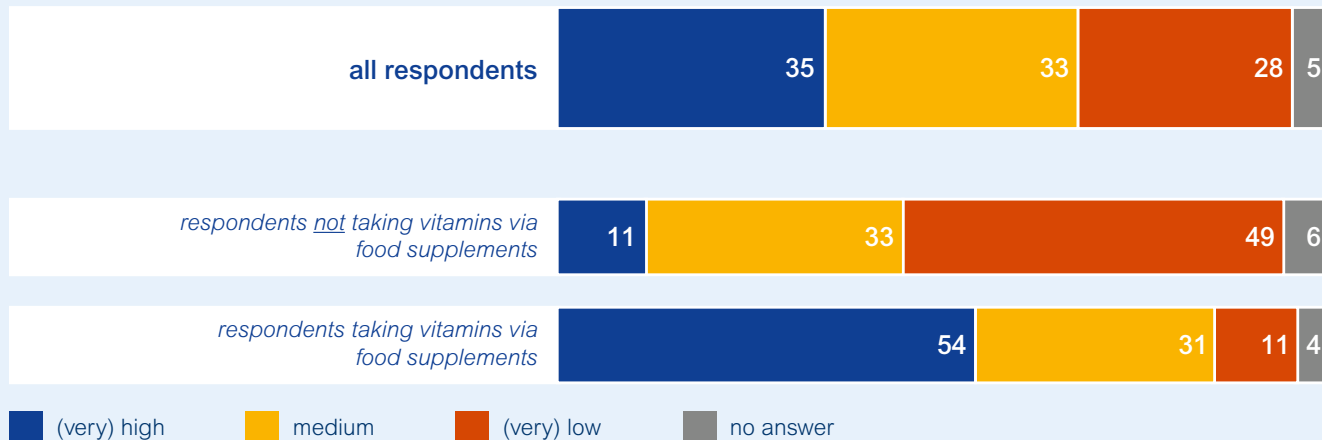
Multiple choice

Basis: 572 respondents that take vitamins via food supplements; Figures given in percentages




How do you rate the health benefits of vitamins as food supplements (in concentrated form)?

Rating of health benefits



Response scale: 1 "very low" to 5 "very high"

Basis: 1,023 respondents / 445 respondents not taking vitamins via food supplements / 572 respondents taking vitamins via food supplements; Figures given in percentages



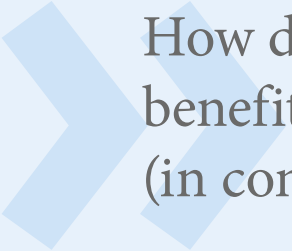
How do you rate the health risks of vitamins as food supplements (in concentrated form)?

Rating of health risks



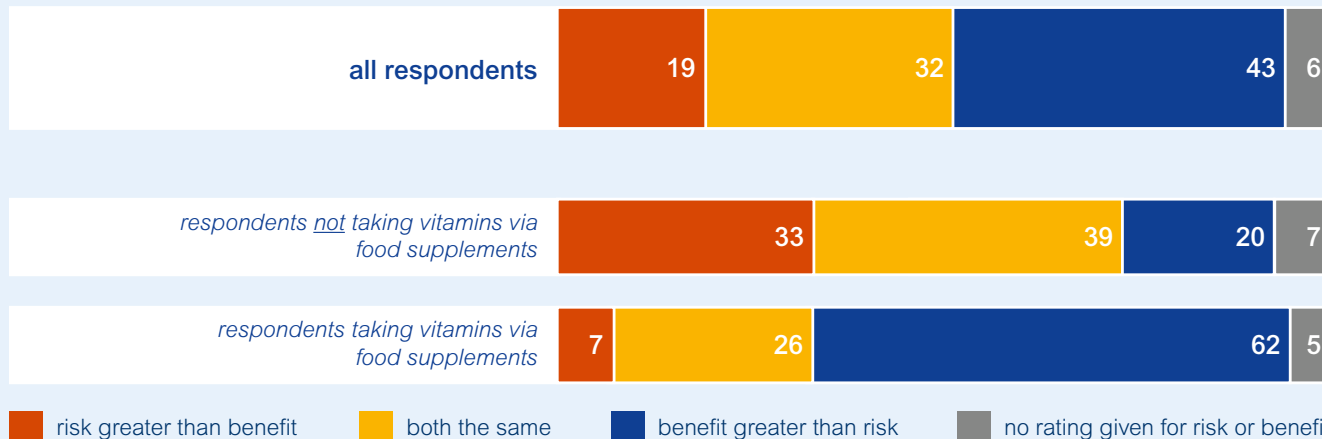
Response scale: 1 "very low" to 5 "very high"

Basis: 1,023 respondents / 445 respondents not taking vitamins via food supplements / 572 respondents taking vitamins via food supplements; Figures given in percentages




How do you rate the health risks and health benefits of vitamins as food supplements (in concentrated form)?

Ratio of risk and benefit rating



Response scale: 1 “very low” to 5 “very high”

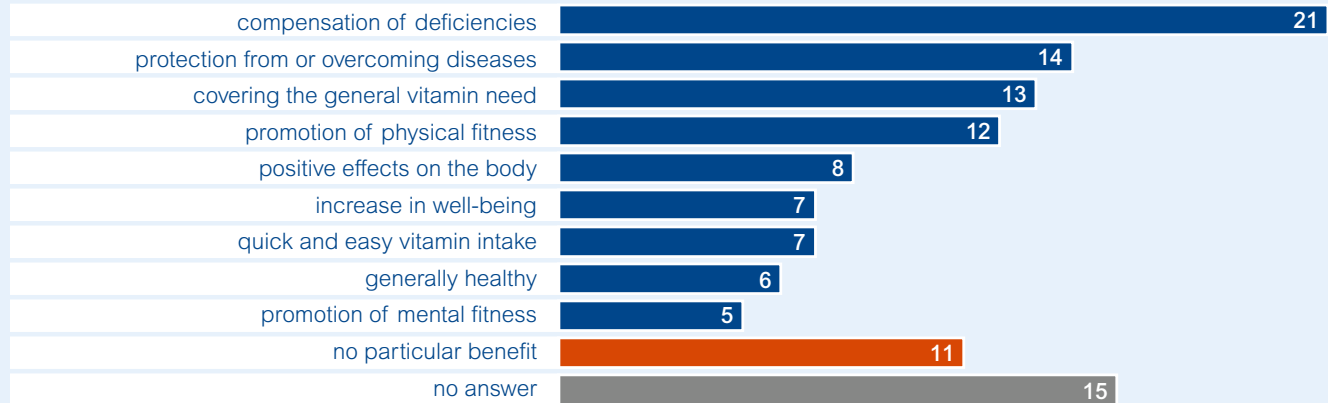
Basis: 1,023 respondents / 445 respondents not taking vitamins via food supplements / 572 respondents taking vitamins via food supplements; Figures given in percentages



Which health benefits do you think vitamins as food supplements (in concentrated form) have?


You can name up to three benefits.

Potential health benefits



Mentions without predefined response options
 Shown: benefits that were spontaneously mentioned by at least 5 percent of respondents

*Basis: 690 respondents who stated a medium to very high benefit for vitamins as food supplements;
 Figures given in percentages*



Which health risks do you think vitamins
as food supplements (in concentrated form)
pose?


You can name up to three risks.

Potential health risks



Mentions without predefined response options
Shown: risks that were spontaneously mentioned by at least 5 percent of respondents

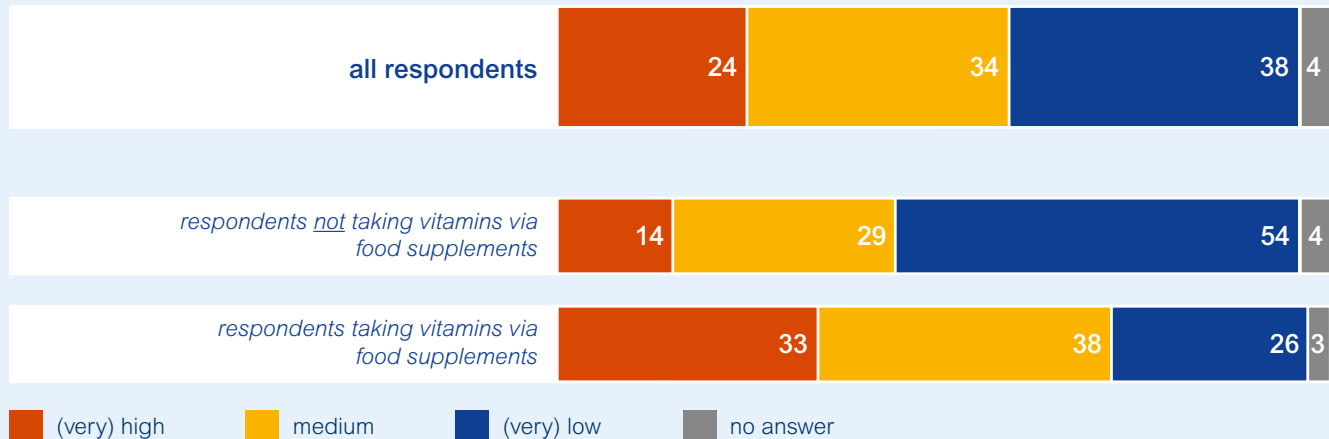
*Basis: 497 respondents who stated a medium to very high risk for vitamins as food supplements;
Figures given in percentages*



How likely do you think it is that people who do not take vitamins via food supplements (in concentrated form) will fall into an undersupply?

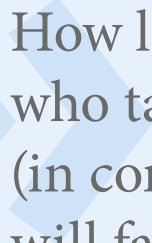
An undersupply occurs when the body receives less vitamins than needed.

Likelihood of a vitamin undersupply occurring



Response scale: 1 “very low” to 5 “very high”

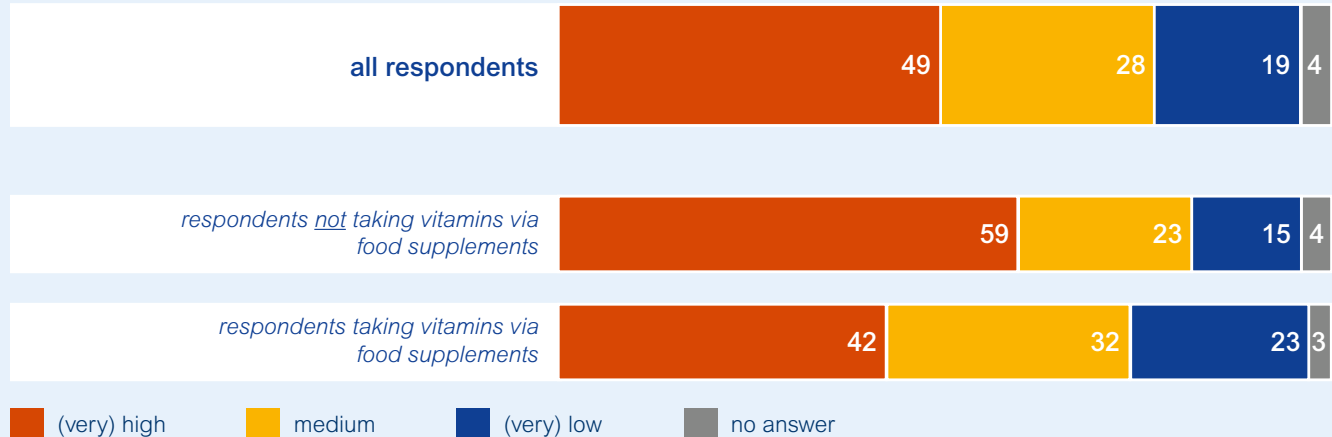
Basis: 1,023 respondents / 445 respondents not taking vitamins via food supplements / 572 respondents taking vitamins via food supplements; Figures given in percentages



How likely do you think it is that people who take vitamins via food supplements (in concentrated form) on a daily basis will fall into an oversupply?

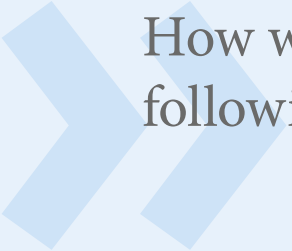
An oversupply occurs when the body receives more vitamins than needed.

Likelihood of a vitamin oversupply occurring



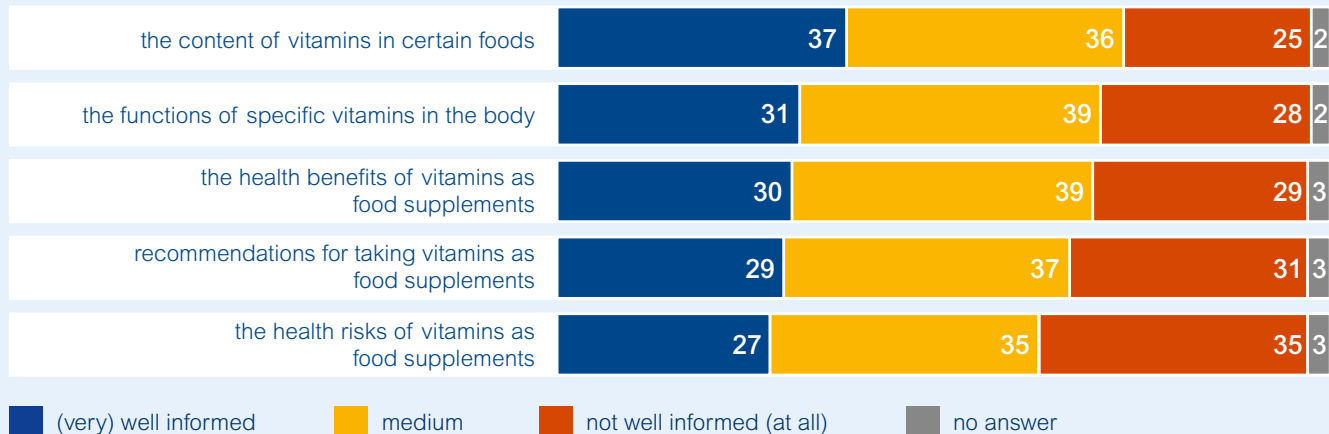
Response scale: 1 "very low" to 5 "very high"

Basis: 1,023 respondents / 445 respondents not taking vitamins via food supplements / 572 respondents taking vitamins via food supplements; Figures given in percentages




How well informed do you feel about the following aspects of vitamins?

Perceived level of information



Response scale: 1 “not well informed at all” to 5 “very well informed”

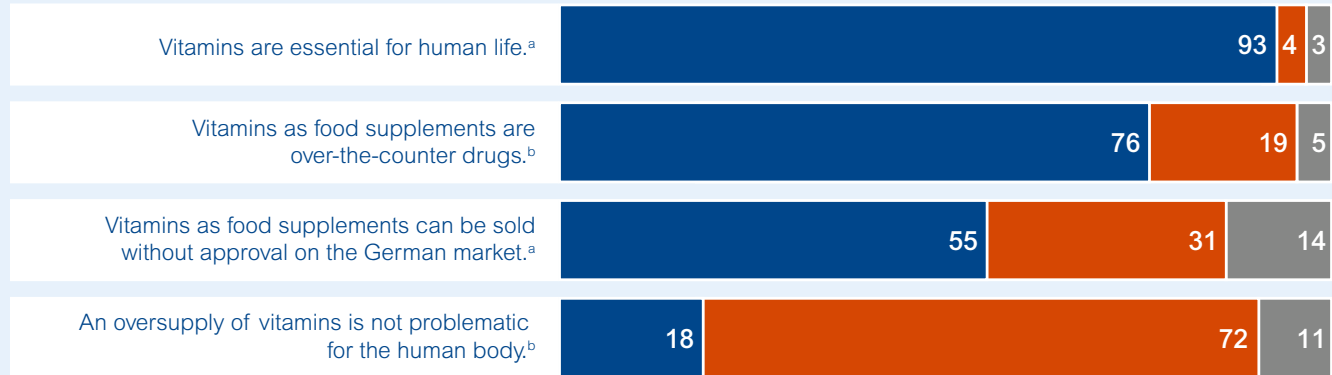
Basis: 1,023 respondents; Figures given in percentages



What do you think: Are the following statements about vitamins true or false?

If you are unsure, please indicate what you would guess.

Knowledge about vitamins



■ true
 ■ false
 ■ no answer

Single choice

^a true statement, ^b false statement

Basis: 1,023 respondents; Figures given in percentages

How were the data collected?

Survey period:	23 to 28 November 2021
Number of respondents:	1,023
Sample:	Participants from an online access panel in Germany aged 16 years and over
Representativeness:	Random sample of panel participants with representative quota control according to gender, age, education, and region Additional weighting according to gender, education, age, employment, size of city, German federal state, and household size
Survey method:	Online survey (CAWI)
Presentation of results:	All figures given in percentages; rounding differences possible
Conducted by:	INFO GmbH

Vitamins as food supplements

Vitamins are organic compounds that the human organism cannot produce, or can only produce in insufficient amounts. Since the body needs them for vital functions, vitamins must be ingested with food. They are found in plant and animal foods. In healthy people who eat a balanced diet, an insufficient vitamin intake and a resulting undersupply are very rare.

Vitamins in the form of food supplements are available, for example, as tablets, capsules, powder or liquids in concentrated form. In individual cases, the intake of vitamins via food supplements may be necessary or useful, for example taking folic acid (vitamin B9) before and during early pregnancy. However, taking high doses of vitamins without any actual need can increase the risk of an oversupply as well as undesirable health effects.

Food supplements are food, hence must not endanger the health of consumers. The responsibility for this generally lies with the food companies. Similarly, food supplements do not undergo any official authorisation procedure, during which actual health safety must be proven. The German Food Supplements Regulation (NemV) specifies which vitamins may be added to a food supplement. However, it does not contain any legally binding maximum levels for vitamins or other ingredients. The recommendations published by the BfR for maximum levels of vitamins in food supplements can serve as a basis for the creation of legal regulations at EU level.

About the BfR

Do nanoparticles promote the occurrence of allergies? Does apple juice contain too much aluminium? The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, or BfR for short, is responsible for answering questions on all aspects of the health assessment of foods and feeds, consumer products and chemicals. Through its work, it makes a decisive contribution towards ensuring that food, products and the use of chemicals have become safer in Germany. The Institute's main tasks comprise the assessment of existing health risks and identification of new ones, the development of recommendations to limit risks and the transparent communication of this process. This work results in the scientific advice given to political decision makers. To help with the strategic alignment of its risk communication, the BfR conducts its own research in the field of risk perception. The Institute is independent in its scientific assessments, research and communication. The BfR belongs to the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL).

i More information at: www.bfr.bund.de/en

Vitamins:

> **A-Z Index > V > vitamins**

> **Food safety > Substance risks > Vitamins and Minerals**

Food supplements:

> **A-Z Index > F > food supplements**

> **Food safety > Special food groups > Food supplements**

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