Niacin (Vitamin B3)

WHAT IS IT?

Niacin (also known as vitamin B3) is a water-soluble vitamin. Like other B vitamins, niacin helps the body to convert carbohydrates into glucose for energy, and also helps the body use fats and protein. It is important for nervous system function, circulation, and the body's production of stress-related hormones as well as healthy brain chemistry.

Niacin is the generic name for the two common forms of B3, nicotinic acid and nicotinamide. Good dietary sources are meat, poultry, salmon, tuna, legumes, and fortified breakfast cereals and grain products. Most people can meet all of the body's daily needs for B3 through diet.

WHO MIGHT CONSIDER TAKING THIS?

Your health care provider might recommend niacin supplements if you have any of the following:

- Skin cancer (not melanoma) or pre-cancerous skin lesions
- Fatty liver disease
- Certain medication use: isoniazid, azathioprine
- Intestinal malabsorption
- Low tryptophan diet (e.g., corn-based)
- Malnutrition

PREPARATIONS AND DOSAGE

Niacin should only be taken under the care of a health professional, to ensure appropriate dosing and monitoring for liver abnormalities.

CONCERNS?

Niacin has been used for the treatment of high cholesterol and high triglycerides. However, niacin has not been effective in reducing heart attacks and may actually increase the risk for cardiovascular disease.

ⓘ Nicotinic Acid

Adverse effects: Flushing itching; headache; liver toxicity; GI symptoms; activation of peptic ulcer; hyperglycemia/reduced insulin sensitivity.

Contraindications: active liver disease or unexplained LFT elevations; peptic ulcer disease.

✓ Nicotinamide

Nicotinamide is generally well tolerated.

Notes:

Disclaimer: Information provided is for general informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice, nor does it establish a doctor-patient relationship. Always seek the advice of your qualified health provider. We assume no responsibility for errors or omissions in the content.

© 2026 The Arizona Board of Regents on behalf of The University of Arizona.