

Table 1 Major Minerals

Mineral	Main Function	Main Sources	Deficiency	Excess
Calcium	Formation and maintenance of bones and teeth. Blood clotting and nerve function.	Milk, cheese, yogurt and canned fish are rich sources. Also dark green leafy vegetables, white and brown flour and bread.	Bone weakening-rickets and osteomalacia. This is also due to failure to absorb calcium owing to vitamin D deficiency.	Not known in adults
Sodium	Regulation of body water content. Nerve function.	Salt - either added to foods during processing or at home in cooking or at the table.	Fatigue, nausea, cramps. Thirst is experienced.	Excess sodium has been linked to hypertension.
Potassium	Functioning of cells. Constituent of body fluids.	All foods except sugars, fats and oils. Unprocessed foods have more potassium than processed foods.	Weakness, mental confusion and, if extreme, heart failure.	Excess is dangerous especially if the kidneys are not functioning properly.
Magnesium	Involved in energy transfer in the cell, in enzyme activity and muscle functioning.	Widespread but wholegrain cereals, nuts and spinach are good sources.	Depression, irritability, fits, tiredness and, if extreme, heart attack.	Excess magnesium is not absorbed.
Phosphorus	An essential component of all cells and present in bones and teeth.	Milk, cheese, meat, fish and eggs are good sources.	Dietary deficiency unknown.	Not known in adults.