

The human body does not produce vitamin B₁₂ but is obtained from eating animal products, vitamin B₁₂ fortified foods or taking supplements. We need vitamin B₁₂ to make red blood cells, for nerve function and for keeping your brain healthy, therefore, it is important to correct vitamin B₁₂ deficiency as early as possible.

Absorption occurs at the end of the small intestine (terminal ileum). Vitamin B₁₂ is sometimes reduced in pouch patients, as a result of the terminal ileum being transected or reconfigured and sitting in faecal pouch content. However, our body usually stores enough vitamin B₁₂ for several years, so vitamin B₁₂ deficiency is not something to worry about immediately, but it is important to be aware of. Moreover, vegans or vegetarian patients with a pouch can have low Vitamin B₁₂ levels prior to pouch surgery.

It is usually sufficient to eat foods rich in vitamin B₁₂ such as poultry, meat, eggs, liver, kidney, fish, dairy products, seafood, and yeast extract (such as Marmite).

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF VITAMIN B₁₂ DEFICIENCY

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blurred vision• Pale skin• Irregular heartbeat (palpitations)• Weak muscles• Shortness of breath• Anaemia (low red cells count)• Feeling faint, lethargic and tired | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nerve problems such as “pins and needles” or numbness/tingling in hands, legs and feet• Mood changes such as depression, irritability, and behaviour changes• Memory loss• Difficulty concentrating• Loss of appetite |
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Vitamin B₁₂ supplements may be given as oral tablets or more commonly a monthly or 3 monthly vitamin B₁₂ injection. Nasal spray or sublingual supplements are also used but less commonly.

GP should check vitamin B₁₂ levels with a blood test:

- If signs or symptoms of low vitamin B₁₂ levels are present
- after initial vitamin B₁₂ deficiency treatment
- as part of **routine annual** blood tests following pouch surgery

However, there is some inconclusive data suggesting that in some cases vitamin B₁₂ levels blood test may not necessarily be low in vitamin B₁₂ deficiency in pouch patients.

Therefore, if there are symptoms suggestive of vitamin B12 deficiency, it may be beneficial to trial vitamin B12 injections for 3 months and monitor if symptoms improve, rather than relying only on blood tests.

So, if not contraindicated due to any other underlying conditions, it is advisable to try vitamin B12 injections treatment for 3 months and then review patient's symptoms.

If there are concerns that the cause for the patient's symptoms may be due to a different condition, these should be investigated locally or a referral to a specialist centre must be made.