

Foods That Increase & Decrease Absorption

Calcium, Magnesium, Iron, Electrolytes & Protein

Getting enough of a nutrient isn't the whole story — what you eat it with matters just as much. Some foods and habits genuinely boost how much your body absorbs and uses; others quietly block it. This guide covers 5 key nutrients, with what helps and what gets in the way for each.

Calcium

↑ INCREASES ABSORPTION	
Vitamin D Foods (Egg Yolk, Fortified Milk)	Vitamin D is essential for your gut to actually absorb calcium.
Vitamin K2 Foods (Curd, Fermented Foods)	Helps direct absorbed calcium toward bones rather than soft tissue.
Magnesium-Rich Foods (Nuts, Seeds)	Magnesium is needed to activate vitamin D, indirectly supporting calcium use.
↓ DECREASES ABSORPTION	
High-Oxalate Foods (Spinach, Beet Greens)	Oxalates bind to calcium in the gut, reducing how much is absorbed.
Unsoaked Grains & Legumes (Phytates)	Phytic acid binds calcium, lowering its absorption.
Excess Caffeine	Can increase how much calcium is lost through urine.
Excess Sodium	High salt intake increases calcium excretion over time.

Magnesium

↑ INCREASES ABSORPTION	
Vitamin D Foods	Works synergistically with magnesium in several shared metabolic pathways.
Soaked or Sprouted Grains & Legumes	Soaking reduces phytic acid, improving magnesium availability.
↓ DECREASES ABSORPTION	
High-Phytate Foods (Unsoaked Grains, Legumes)	Phytates bind magnesium, reducing how much your body can absorb.
Excess Alcohol	Increases magnesium excretion through urine.
Very High-Dose Calcium Supplements	Can compete with magnesium for absorption when taken in excess.

Iron

↑ INCREASES ABSORPTION

Vitamin C Foods (Lemon, Amla, Citrus)	Dramatically boosts non-heme (plant-based) iron absorption when eaten together.
Meat or Fish Alongside Plant Iron Sources	The “meat factor” enhances how much non-heme iron your body absorbs.

↓ DECREASES ABSORPTION

Tea & Coffee (Tannins)	Tannins bind iron and significantly reduce absorption if consumed with meals.
Dairy & Calcium-Rich Foods	Calcium competes with iron for absorption when eaten in the same meal.
Unsoaked Whole Grains & Legumes	Phytates bind iron, reducing its bioavailability.

Electrolytes

↑ INCREASES ABSORPTION

Potassium-Rich Foods (Banana, Coconut Water)	Supports healthy sodium-potassium balance in the body.
Adequate Water Intake	Proper hydration is needed for electrolytes to be transported and used effectively.
Natural Sodium Sources (in Moderation)	Sodium is genuinely necessary for fluid and electrolyte balance.

↓ DECREASES ABSORPTION

Excess Caffeine & Alcohol	Both have a diuretic effect, increasing electrolyte loss through urine.
Heavy Sweating Without Replenishment	Intense exercise or heat depletes sodium and potassium quickly.
High-Sugar Drinks	Can worsen dehydration-related electrolyte imbalance instead of correcting it.

Protein Absorption

↑ INCREASES ABSORPTION

Vitamin B6 Foods (Bananas, Chickpeas)	Supports protein metabolism and amino acid utilization in the body.
Zinc-Rich Foods (Pumpkin Seeds, Meat)	Zinc supports the enzymes involved in protein synthesis.
Pairing Protein With Some Carbs	Supports insulin-mediated amino acid uptake into muscle tissue.

↓ DECREASES ABSORPTION

Excess Alcohol	Impairs protein synthesis and how effectively your body utilizes dietary protein.
Raw or Undercooked Legumes	Contain trypsin inhibitors that block protein-digesting enzymes; cooking neutralizes this.
Excess Tannins (Unripe Fruits, Strong Tea)	Can interfere with protein digestion when consumed in large amounts with meals.

Note: These effects are generally modest and matter most when they happen repeatedly, meal after meal — an occasional coffee with a meal won't meaningfully affect your iron levels. This guide is for general education, not medical or dietary prescription — consult a doctor or dietitian if you have a diagnosed deficiency.