Fact Sheet: Arginine

**What is it?** Arginine is an amino acid – one of many ‘building blocks’ of proteins. These building blocks can be arranged in hundreds of unique combinations to manufacture body proteins. These specific arrangements of amino acids determine what that protein will ultimately become – whether it’s skin or hair or muscle, or an enzyme or hormone that helps to regulate certain body processes.

**What does it do?**

Arginine has several functions in the body; Arginine is used in the manufacture of a variety of important compounds, including nitric oxide which has beneficial effects on the heart. It also assists in secretion of hormones and maintenance of blood sugar, and it also supports the immune system.

**Why is it important?**

One of the most important roles of arginine is in cardiovascular health. Nitric oxide, made in the body from arginine, helps keep blood vessels elastic which improves blood flow and helps support healthy blood pressure. Arginine is also involved in the production of creatine, a substance that ultimately helps provide energy to working muscles. Another role for arginine is in helping the body remove waste products that are naturally produced during the breakdown of dietary protein.

**Where is it found?** Our bodies can manufacture arginine, but if we have inadequate intakes from the diet, particularly during periods of growth, the body may not make enough to make up for the short supply and supplementation can help to meet needs. Arginine can be found in a wide variety of foods, including protein-rich dairy products, meat, fish and poultry; vegetarians get their arginine from whole grains like wheat and oats, nuts, seeds and beans. Certain fruits, such as watermelon, contain citrulline, another amino acid which the body converts to arginine.

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