

**Family Living
Focus**

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Today's Americans Have Diverse Religious Affiliations America is one of the most diverse countries in the world in terms of religious affiliations. The trend toward increasing religious diversity continues, sparked by conversions and migration.

The Christian population, including Catholics and Protestants of all denominations, comprise about 81 percent of the American population.

A wide variety of other religious beliefs are held and practiced today. The fastest growing religious group in this country are Muslims, with an estimated 6 million followers. Other religions practiced in the U.S. include Judaism, Buddhism, Baha'i, Hinduism, Confucianism, Jehovah's Witness, Amish, Mennonite, Mormon, Quakers, Seventh-Day Adventist, Sikhism, Unitarians, and spiritual traditions of Native Americans. These are by far, not inclusive of all religions practiced in this country.

Many Americans know little or nothing about faiths other than their own. Learning about other faiths can help to increase understanding among diverse groups of people. Knowledge and understanding can break down fear and distrust that begins with ignorance. It can help to build greater connectedness among diverse populations. The following is a glimpse at a few selected religions.

Islam. Muslims practice the religion of Islam and worship Allah as the one true God. They obey the teachings of Muhammad, the messenger of Allah. According to Islam, Allah's words are spoken to Muhammad and these were written down to form the Koran, the Muslim holy book. There are Muslims of all races and nationalities and from greatly diverse backgrounds. Basic practices followed by all Muslims include: Declaring their faith in the oneness of Allah and in the prophet Muhammad; praying to Allah five times each day; fasting from before dawn until sunset every day during the Islamic month of Ramadan; paying an annual welfare levy of 2.5 percent of one's wealth after personal and business expenses; and at least once in one's lifetime, going on a pilgrimage to Mecca, the city where the first house of Allah was built, and where the prophet Muhammad was born.

The Muslim church is called a mosque. Either inside or near it, every mosque has a place for people to wash before prayer. Before entering the prayer hall, shoes are removed. Inside there is no furniture; people stand, bow, kneel, and sit on their heels to worship. The religious leader is called imam. The imam leads the five daily prayers, gives a talk at the midday Friday prayer, performs marriages and funerals, answers questions

about Islamic teaching and practices, and gives advice to people about their problems.

Buddhism. Buddhism began in India more than 2,500 years ago and is a major religion in many Asian countries today. Followers of Buddha try to live in harmony with themselves, with others, and with the environment. Buddhists are encouraged to practice six perfections: generosity, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom. Meditation is important, as it allows the mind and body to be peaceful.

Ordained followers and teachers of Buddhism are called monks and nuns. Monks and nuns live simple lives, renouncing possessions and keeping only what is necessary. They depend on the generosity of others for basic needs such as food and clothing. Many shave their heads as a renouncement of vanity. Some of the important teachings of Buddhism include the Eightfold Path and the Five Moral Precepts.

The Eightfold Path includes: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Work, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation. The Five Moral Precepts include: To try not to harm living things; to try not to steal; to try not to use sexuality to harm oneself or others; to try not to tell lies or call people names; and to try not to use drink or drugs that harm mind or body.

Quaker. Quakers came to America from England in the mid 1600s. They refer to themselves and the Society of Friends. Although the Bible is valued as a source of truth, Quakers also believe that each of us has the capacity to communicate directly with God through the divine spirit within ourselves. As we become conscious of the "Inward Light" or the "Christ Within", and submit ourselves to its leadings, we are able to live in conformity to the will of God. The name Quakers comes from the idea that

Extra Vitamin C Might Hurt

Doesn't extra vitamin C just get released in the urine? If so, what's the problem with taking megadoses?

First, let's review what the new Recommended Dietary Allowance is for vitamin C. It's 90 milligrams a day for men and 75 milligrams for women. That's up from 60 milligrams a day for men and women. For smokers, add 35 milligrams to help combat the increased loss of vitamin C smokers experience daily due to "oxidative stress."

Along with the new RDAs, the National Institute of Medicine also determined a "Tolerable Upper Intake Level" of 2,000 milligrams, or 2 grams, per day. That's 16 times greater than the highest of the new RDAs — that for a male smoker — and nearly 27 times what female non-smokers need.

You're right — if you consume more vitamin C than your body needs, it will be released in urine or in stools. However, too much can lead to diarrhea, stomach inflammation, and

other gastrointestinal problems. How much is "too much" is under some debate — some studies have reported problems at doses of 3,000 to 4,000 milligrams a day; others have reported only minor problems at 10,000 milligrams a day. The 2,000 milligram limit takes into account a safety factor and is designed to protect the most sensitive individuals in a healthy population.

The panel also examined other potential problems, such as excess iron absorption, reduced levels of vitamin B12 and copper, and increased risk of kidney stones. However, research results on these issues have been mixed, at least for healthy adults. People with a history of kidney problems need to be more careful.

Despite the increased RDA for vitamin C, you probably won't see vitamin C percentages on Nutrition Facts labels change soon. Those are based on the "Daily Value" of various nutrients. Daily Values are set by the Food and Drug Administration and are based only in part on RDAs, partially because so many RDAs are different for men, women and different age groups. While the Daily Value for vitamin C might change in the future, right now it remains at 60 milligrams. So, food with 10 percent of the Daily Value of vitamin C contains 6 milligrams — less than 5 percent of the RDA for male smokers.



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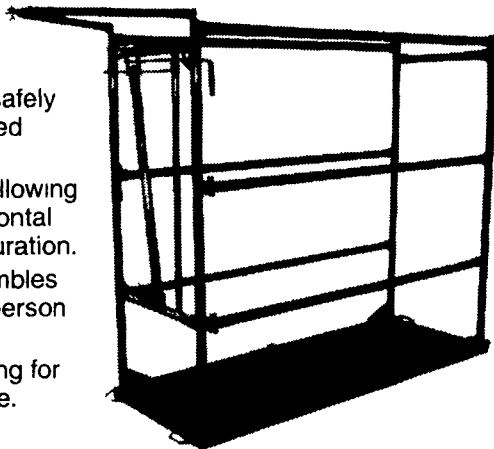


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