

Calcium

What is calcium?

Calcium is a mineral that is very important for:

- teeth
- nerves
- muscles
- bone health
- blood clotting.

If you do not get enough calcium in your diet you may be at risk for losing calcium from your bones and developing a condition called osteoporosis.

How much calcium do I need?

How much calcium you need depends on your age and whether you are male or female. The recommendations are shown in the first table.

What are good sources of calcium?

Dairy products are one of the best sources of calcium. Calcium may also be found in a variety of other foods.

Many brands of orange juice, cereal, and bread are fortified with extra calcium. Check the labels.

Do I need a calcium supplement?

If you can get enough calcium in your diet, you do not need to take calcium supplements.

Calcium Recommendations

Group	mg calcium/day
Children	800
Teenagers (up to age 24)	1200
Adult men	800
Premenopausal women (over age 24)	1000
Postmenopausal women	1000-1500
Pregnant and breast-feeding women (age 18 or less)	1300
Pregnant and breast-feeding women (age 19-50)	1000

Dairy products are the easiest source of calcium. It is difficult to get enough calcium without consuming these products. Some people cannot digest

most dairy products because their bodies lack the enzyme needed to break down milk sugar (lactose). They must follow a lactose-free diet. There

Sources of Calcium

Food	Serving size	mg calcium (approximate)
Milk, whole, 2%, 1%, or skim	8 oz	300
Yogurt	8 oz	300
Cheddar cheese	1 oz	200
Ice cream	1/2 cup	100
Frozen yogurt	1/2 cup	100
Cottage cheese	1/2 cup	90
Tofu, firm	4 oz.	250
Soy milk, unfortified	8 oz	80
Greens (collard, kale, mustard)	1/2 cup	80-150
Red beans, chickpeas	3/4 cup	60
Sardines (with bones)	3 oz	350
Salmon, canned (with bones)	3 oz	180
Molasses, blackstrap	1 tablespoon	125
Corn tortilla	2	90
Seaweed, dry	1/2 cup	100

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are enzyme replacement products available to aid in digestion of dairy products. Ask your doctor, nutritionist, or pharmacist about these products.

If you do need calcium supplements, many types are available. The calcium is usually combined with carbonate, citrate, lactate, gluconate, or phosphate. The body absorbs all forms of calcium equally well. However, avoid bone

meal, dolomite, and oyster shell calcium because they may contain lead or other toxic metals. Check the label to see how much "essential calcium" is in each pill.

Too much calcium from supplements may cause a problem with kidney stones in some people.

Does anything affect the body's ability to absorb calcium?

Caffeine can decrease absorption, as can too much dietary fiber, phosphates (soft drinks), and taking medicines like tetracycline (an antibiotic) and antacids that contain aluminum. Vitamin D increases calcium absorption.