



Calcium for strong bones

and a strong body

Calcium is an essential mineral that plays an important role in nerve conduction, muscle contraction, and blood clotting. Calcium is also needed to build and maintain strong bones and helps reduce the risk of osteoporosis. Of all the calcium in the body, 99 percent is found in our bones and teeth.

How much calcium do I need?

Daily Dietary Reference Intakes for calcium are:

- children 1 to 3 years old: 500mg
- children 4 to 8 years old: 800mg
- teenagers 9 to 18 years old (including girls who are pregnant or breastfeeding): 1,300mg
- adults 19 to 50 years old (including women who are pregnant or breastfeeding): 1,000mg
- adults 51 years and older: 1,200mg



Postmenopausal women and adults 65 years and older should get 1,500mg of calcium daily. Postmenopausal women also have a harder time absorbing calcium (estrogen helps increase calcium absorption) and may want to take calcium and vitamin D supplements.

Older adults should consume more calcium and vitamin D to reduce risk of bone breaks and fractures, and osteoporosis.

How much is too much?

Do not get more than 2,500mg of calcium per day. It's unlikely you'll reach this level from foods, but if you take a calcium supplement, check the dosage.

Too much calcium can cause constipation, increase your risk for developing calcium kidney stones, and may block the absorption of iron and zinc from foods.

Most people don't have to worry about calcium overdose. In fact, it's quite the opposite. The average adult gets only 500mg to 700mg per day, far below the national recommendation. Consider calcium sources as you plan your diet.

Good sources of calcium

The best way to meet your calcium needs is through the foods you eat. Dairy products are an excellent source. One cup of nonfat milk contains 300mg of calcium — a quarter of your daily recommended intake. Choose low- or nonfat dairy products to cut down on calories and fat without losing calcium.

If you are lactose intolerant or don't eat dairy products, nondairy calcium-rich foods like green vegetables or fortified foods such as cereals, orange juice, and soy milk can supply your calcium needs. Many of these foods are also fortified with vitamin D to help with calcium's absorption. You can also find lactose-free dairy goods at most grocery stores.

For other ways to add calcium to your plate, get a list of more foods high in calcium.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps absorb calcium and also helps our bodies turn calcium into bone. Adults 50 and older need 1000 IU of vitamin D (preferably vitamin D3) daily. Adults under the age of 50 should aim for 600 IU of vitamin D a day. Your doctor may recommend a higher amount of vitamin D if you are deficient. Vitamin D is often combined with calcium in some supplements — be sure to check the label.

Related links

Calcium and vitamin D needs for women
Who should take a supplement?

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