



NUTRI-FACTS: CALCIUM

Calcium is a mineral that your body needs to build strong bones and keep your heart healthy.¹ Like other minerals, calcium is an inorganic substance found in soil and water that is absorbed by plants or eaten by animals.¹ Your body cannot produce calcium.² That is why you should try to consume foods that contain calcium to stay healthy.²

Health Benefits

Your body mainly uses calcium to develop and maintain strong bones and teeth.² Without adequate calcium, you are at risk of developing osteoporosis, which is a disease that causes bone weakness that may lead to fractures of the wrist, hip, and spine.² A lack of calcium may also lead to tooth loss or other dental problems.² In addition, calcium helps with muscle contraction, blood clotting, maintaining a regular heartbeat, sending and receiving nerve signals, and releasing hormones.^{2,3}

Calcium Needs

Calcium needs are based on your age and gender.⁴ To protect your bones and maintain overall health, you should meet your calcium needs daily. It is important to note that excessive intake, more than 2500 milligrams (mg) of calcium, is not recommended.⁵ Too much calcium over an extended period of time may cause health problems, such as constipation or kidney stones.³

Male Calcium Needs⁴

| Age (years) | mg/day |
|-------------|--------|
| 1-3 | 700 |
| 4-8 | 1000 |
| 9-18 | 1300 |
| 19-70 | 1000 |
| 71+ | 1200 |

Female Calcium Needs⁴

| Age (years) | mg/day |
|-------------|--------|
| 1-3 | 700 |
| 4-8 | 1000 |
| 9-18 | 1300 |
| 19-50 | 1000 |
| 51+ | 1200 |

Food Sources

Calcium naturally exists in a variety of foods.³ It is also added to many products in a fortification process that increases the vitamin and mineral content of the foods.³ If you eat a well-balanced diet that includes a combination of the foods listed below, you should be able to meet your daily calcium needs without taking a supplement.^{2,3}

- Dairy: fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese
- Vegetables: leafy greens, such as kale, broccoli, and bok choy
- Fish: canned sardines and salmon
- Calcium fortified foods: some orange juice, breakfast cereals, bread, soy beverages, and tofu (Check the Nutrition Facts label to ensure that specific products contain calcium.)

Tips for Getting More Calcium

Unfortunately, too many people do not get the recommended amount of calcium that their body needs on a daily basis.³ To make sure you don't fall short of this vital nutrient and to maintain good health, consider the following tips^{5,6}:

- Get 3 cups of dairy or soy alternative products with added calcium every day
- Drink an 8 ounce glass of fat-free or low-fat milk or soy beverage with added calcium with meals
- Add ½ cup of steamed broccoli and ¼ cup fat-free or low-fat cheese to a baked potato
- Top salads or chili with fat-free or low-fat cheese
- Mix kale in with other greens, such as spinach or arugula, to make a salad
- Dip fruit into 1 cup of fat-free or low-fat yogurt for a snack
- Try adding sardines to a salad or homemade pizza



Supplements

Health care professionals recommend consuming calcium-rich foods throughout the day (rather than all at once) to meet your calcium needs.⁵ However, supplements may be needed by some individuals who are not able to meet their needs through food alone.³ For example, calcium supplementation may be needed by those who are lactose intolerant or vegan due to dietary restrictions.³ Likewise, calcium supplementation may be needed by growing children to aid in bone formation or the elderly to slow their rate of bone loss.³ If you think that you are in need of additional calcium beyond what your current diet can provide, consult a health care provider or dietitian before taking a supplement.

Calcium supplements come in two main forms – carbonate and citrate.³ Both forms are available over-the-counter. Calcium carbonate is inexpensive and best absorbed when taken with food.³ Calcium citrate is more expensive and can be taken with or without food.³ In addition, many multi-vitamin and mineral supplements contain calcium, although you should check the Supplement Facts label as the forms and amounts vary by brand.³

Much like calcium-rich foods, it is recommended that calcium supplements be taken throughout the day rather than all at once.³ For example, if you rely exclusively on supplements to meet your 1000 mg/day calcium needs then you should divide the dose in half and take 500 mg in the morning and 500 mg at night.³ If you take calcium supplements, in addition to consuming calcium-rich foods, be sure that your total intake from both sources does not exceed the recommended amounts outlined above.³ Remember, you need calcium for strong bones and overall health, but too much of a good thing can be problematic. Excessive calcium intake, regardless of the source, can cause health issues.

Resources

- ▶ [Nutri-Facts: Vitamins and Minerals](#): A fact sheet that highlights the various different vitamins and minerals that your body needs to stay healthy.
- ▶ [Nutri-Facts: Supplements](#): A fact sheet that outlines the use of supplements as well as the health and safety concerns associated with their use.
- ▶ [HPW Healthy Eating](#): Educational resources and materials to help you select nutrient-dense foods to improve your overall health, prevent chronic disease, and enhance performance.
- ▶ [ChooseMyPlate](#): A personalized food plan based on your age, gender, height, weight, and physical activity level. Use this tool from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to learn more about dairy products that will help you meet your daily calcium needs.

To view the references for the Nutri-Facts series, visit:

[HTTP://WWW.MED.NAVY.MIL/SITES/NMCPHC/HEALTH-PROMOTION/PAGES/NUTRI-FACTS_REFERENCES.ASPX](http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/pages/nutri-facts_references.aspx)