

Calcium

What Calcium Is and Why You Need It

Calcium is a mineral that your body needs. Its main job is to build strong bones and teeth. Your bones store calcium for the rest of your body, like a bank keeps money for when you need it.

You need the most calcium when you are between 9 and 18 years old. By the time you are 21 years old, your bones are as strong as they will ever be. From then on, your body mainly takes calcium out of your bones.

If you don't get enough calcium, your body will take the calcium it needs *from your bones*. They will get weak. They can break when you run or dance.

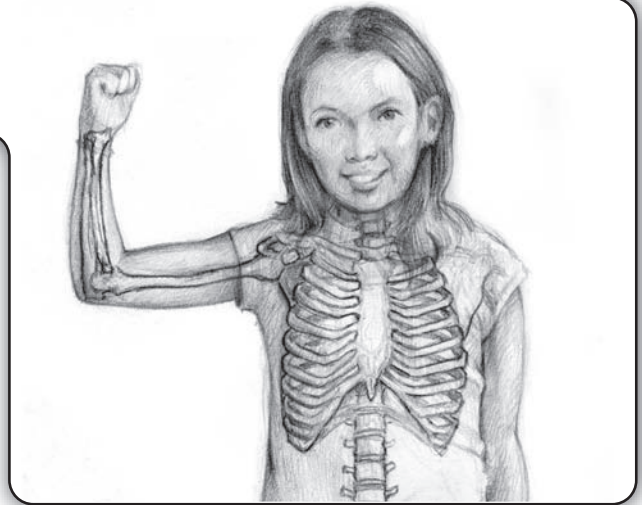
When you get older, you could have a disease called osteoporosis (ah-stee-yoh-puh-ROH-sis). It makes bones so fragile, they can break from just bending over. By then, it is usually too late to rebuild your bones.

How to Get Calcium

The best way to get calcium is by eating foods with lots of calcium. Here are some of the best ones:

- Low-fat milk, yogurt, and other milk products (These have the most calcium.)
- Flavored milks, like chocolate or strawberry (These can have more calories than plain milk.)
- Kale, collard greens, and other dark green, leafy vegetables (but *not* spinach)
- Chickpeas, lentils, split peas
- Canned salmon and sardines (and other fish with bones)
- Cereals and juices *with added calcium* (No more than 1 cup of juice a day, or you'll get too much sugar.)
- Tofu, soy milk with calcium added (Check the label.)

Ask the doctor if you think you need to take extra calcium or if you have trouble digesting milk.



How Much Calcium Do You Need?

This depends on your age. Here's what is recommended:

Daily Calcium Needs

Age	You Need This Much Calcium (mg per day)
4–8 years	800 mg
9–18 years	1,300 mg
19–50 years	1,000 mg

Calcium is measured in milligrams. The short way to write milligrams is *mg*.

Source: National Academy of Sciences

Tips for Getting More Calcium

- Choose milk or smoothies instead of soda pop.
- Add calcium to salads with low-fat cheese, tofu, or beans.
- Choose low-fat yogurt as a snack. Add it to pancakes, waffles, shakes, salad dressings, dips, and sauces.
- Look for foods with added calcium.

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How to Read Food Labels

Food labels list the amount of calcium in a serving as “% Daily Value,” not as milligrams (mg). **100% of the Daily Value = 1,000 mg of calcium per day for an adult.**

But, if you’re between 9 and 18 years old, you need 1,300 mg a day (not 1,000 mg).

Here’s an easy way to find out how many milligrams of calcium are in a serving. Then you can add them up.

Put a “0” at the end of the number listed for the daily value to get the number of milligrams.

For example, a serving of orange juice with added calcium might list the amount of calcium as 30% of the daily value.

30% Daily Value = 300 mg calcium

Usually, foods with at least 20% daily value (200 mg) are high in calcium. Foods with less than 5% of the daily value are low in calcium.

This food has 30% of the calcium an adult needs each day or 300 mg.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (236ml)	
Servings Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 80	Calories from Fat 0
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol Less than 5mg	0%
Sodium 120mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 11g	4%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 11g	
Protein 3g	17%
Vitamin A 10%	Vitamin C 4%
Calcium 30%	Iron 0% • Vitamin D 25%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	

Source: US Food and Drug Administration

Amounts of Calcium in Some Foods

Check food labels for the exact amounts. (See “How to Read Food Labels” on the left.)

Milk Group	Calcium (mg)
Milk, regular or low-fat, 1 cup	245–265
Yogurt, nonfat, fruit, 1 cup	260
Cheese, 1-oz slice	200
Frozen yogurt, 1/2 cup	105
Soy milk, with added calcium, 1 cup	200–500
Protein Group	Calcium (mg)
White beans, cooked, boiled, 1 cup	160
Salmon, canned with bones, 3 oz	205
Tofu, firm, with added calcium, 1/2 cup	205
Vegetables/Fruits	Calcium (mg)
Collards, cooked, 1 cup	265
Orange juice, with added calcium, 1 cup	300

Source: US Department of Agriculture

Health Tip: Choose low-fat or nonfat foods. Make trade-offs. For example, if you drink a milk shake, skip the fries. Low-fat milk has as much calcium as whole milk. (Taking fat out of food does not take out calcium.)

Other Tips for Strong Bones

Calcium doesn’t work alone. You need 3 more things:

- 1. A healthy diet**—Eat lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods.
- 2. Exercise**—Get lots of weight-bearing exercise. This is any exercise you do on your feet, like walking, running, dancing, tennis, or soccer. You can also lift weights to help your bones.
- 3. Vitamin D**—This can come from:
 - Sunlight. (Your body makes vitamin D when the sun shines on your skin.)
 - Milk, other dairy products, drinks, and foods, like cereals, with added vitamin D. (Check the label.)
 - Multivitamins (mull-tee-VYE-tuh-minz).

To learn more, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Web site at www.aap.org.

Your doctor will tell you to do what’s best for you.

This information should not take the place of talking with your doctor.

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