

Get Your Recommended Daily Calcium

Recommended amounts for some nutrients, such as calcium, are called adequate intakes (AIs). These are the amounts that appear to provide what is needed for good health.

AIs (Adequate Intakes) for Calcium	
Age	Milligrams (mg) Calcium/Day
9-18 years	1,300
19-50 years	1,000
51-70 years (males)	1,000
51+ years (females)	1,200
> 70 years (males)	1,200

On the average, American women are getting about half the amount of calcium that's recommended. Also, surveys show 65% of adult men, 90% of teenage girls, and 50% of children fall short on calcium intake.

Note: Ask your doctor how much calcium you should get each day. If you are at risk for osteoporosis, ask, too, if you might benefit from medications to prevent further bone loss. Examples are estrogen from hormone therapy (HT), if you are female; alendronate; raloxifene; and risedronate.

What Does Calcium Do in the Body?

Calcium is needed for strong bones and teeth. It is also needed for your:

- Heart to beat
- Nerves to react
- Blood to clot
- Muscles to flex
- Body cells to stick together



Calcium is needed for strong teeth and bones.

Milk, yogurt, cheese, soy milk, tofu, collard greens, and broccoli are good sources of calcium. (See “Calcium Content in Foods” chart.) If you don’t drink milk because you can’t digest the sugar in milk (lactose intolerance), do the following:

- Have milk products that already have lactase added to them.
- Drink milk fermented by certain bacteria (acidophilus milk), if tolerated.
- Take commercial preparations of lactase (which can be added as drops or taken as pills) when you have lactose-containing foods.
- Have soy milk and other food products with added calcium.

Some persons who can’t digest milk sugar (lactose) can tolerate aged cheeses, yogurt with active cultures, and possibly small amounts of dairy foods if eaten with meals and snacks. If you can’t tolerate milk products at all, eat nondairy food sources of calcium (soymilk, beans, tofu, broccoli, kale, collard greens, spinach, fish with small bones). Have food items that are fortified with calcium, such as some orange and apple juices and calcium fortified cereal products. (See “Calcium Content in Foods” chart and check food labels.)

Labels do not list calcium in milligrams (mg), but as a percentage of the daily value (DV). The DV for calcium is based on 1,000 mg of calcium per day. It’s easy to figure out calcium in mg. Just add zero to the % DV. Examples are given in the chart below.

% DV of Calcium	Milligrams (mg) of Calcium
50%	500
40%	400
30%	300
20%	200
10%	100
5%	50

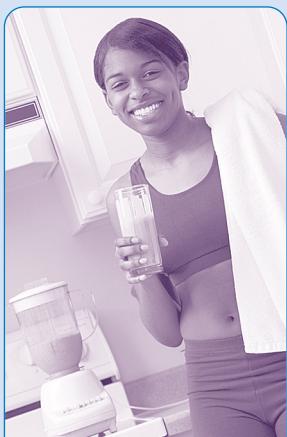
FYI

Milk, yogurt and cheese provide protein, calcium, riboflavin (a B vitamin), vitamin B₁₂, and vitamin D (if fortified).

Calcium Content in Foods		
	Amount	Calcium Milligrams
Milk and Dairy Products		
Skim milk	1 cup	302
1% low-fat milk	1 cup	300
2% low-fat milk	1 cup	300
Whole milk	1 cup	291
Nonfat plain yogurt	8 oz.	452
Low-fat plain yogurt	8 oz.	415
Low-fat plain yogurt with fruit	8 oz.	345
American pasteurized processed cheese	1 oz.	174
Cheddar cheese	1 oz.	204
Cottage cheese, creamed	1/2 cup	68
Low-fat cottage cheese	1/2 cup	69
Low-fat frozen yogurt	1/2 cup	100
Ice milk	1/2 cup	88
Ice cream	1/2 cup	88
Soy milk (calcium fortified)	1 cup	300
Vegetables		
Broccoli, raw	1 stalk	158
Broccoli, cooked	1 cup	94
Collard greens, frozen, chopped, cooked	1 cup	304
Kale, cooked with stems	1 cup	180
Spinach, cooked	1 cup	168
Green snap beans, cooked	1 cup	62
Legumes		
Beans, canned with pork and tomatoes	4 oz.	76
Chick peas (garbanzo beans canned)	3 1/2 oz.	75
Tofu (if calcium is used in processing)	3 1/2 oz.	128

Calcium Content in Foods

	Amount	Calcium Milligrams
Fish and Shellfish		
Salmon, pink, canned with liquid and bones	3 oz.	167
Sardines, canned in oil with bones	3 oz.	371
Tuna, canned with water, solid white	3 oz.	17
Shrimp	3 oz.	33
Other Foods		
Almonds, roasted	1/4 cup	83
Bread, white or wheat	1 slice	200
Total [®] cereal, dry	1 cup	200
Corn muffin made with milk, egg(s)	1	96
Molasses	1 tsp.	33
Orange, fresh	1	54
Orange juice, calcium fortified	6 oz.	225



One way to get calcium from foods is to mix yogurt and fresh fruit for a refreshing drink.

Calcium Supplements

(Check with your doctor or dietitian about taking calcium supplements.)

Calcium supplements should not be used in persons with a history of calcium-containing kidney stones. Supplemental calcium may also worsen chronic constipation and interfere with iron absorption.

If you do take calcium supplements:

- Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water per day.
- Avoid taking more than 500 to 600 mg at one time. Take calcium with meals.
- Avoid bone meal or dolomite. These could contain lead or other toxic metals.
- Avoid taking calcium supplements with iron supplements and laxatives. These can reduce calcium absorption.

There are many forms of calcium supplements. Look for the amount in milligrams of elemental calcium that a source provides. Choose calcium supplements that have calcium carbonate, calcium citrate, and/or calcium gluconate.

{Note: Beware of marketing claims for “coral calcium” products which promote them to prevent or treat cancer, heart disease, lupus, and multiple sclerosis. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has charged some marketers of this with making false and unsubstantiated claims about the product’s health benefits.}



Check with your doctor or pharmacist about possible interactions with calcium and prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

Should I Take a Vitamin D Supplement If I Take a Calcium Supplement?

Vitamin D helps the body absorb and use calcium. You can get vitamin D, daily, from vitamin D fortified dairy products. Other food sources are salt-water fish, egg yolks, and liver. You can also get vitamin D from direct exposure to sunlight on your skin. In general, about 15 minutes of direct sunlight per day gives you the amount of vitamin D needed for a day. Persons who are elderly or homebound often do not get adequate sun exposure to get enough vitamin D. Also, during winter, sunlight in the Northern U.S. is not intense enough to let the body build up enough vitamin D. Check with your doctor or health care provider about the need for a vitamin D supplement. Some calcium supplements also contain vitamin D.

How Do I Get My Adequate Intake for Calcium?

You can get your Adequate Intake (AI) for calcium by having good food sources of calcium and by taking calcium supplements, if necessary.



Milk products are good sources of calcium.

Can I Get Too Much Calcium?

Whether or not you tolerate milk products, if you use calcium supplements, do so wisely. You can easily consume too much calcium with the use of calcium-fortified foods, calcium supplements, and antacids. Long term excessive intakes of calcium might decrease the absorption of other minerals and promote kidney stone formation. Your goal should be to get adequate, rather than, excessive amounts of calcium. Aim to get your Adequate Intake (AI) amount or the amount recommended by your doctor.