

# Calcium

## **WHY DO I NEED IT?**

Our bodies' need for calcium goes way beyond building bones and teeth. Calcium helps with muscle relaxation, blood clotting, nerve impulse transmission, and enzyme reactions. This list of responsibilities is why it's so important to keep up with calcium consumption. If we don't eat and drink enough calcium, our bodies make calcium withdrawals from our "bone banks." Too many withdrawals, and we're left with weak bones that are susceptible to breakage, including stress fractures.

## **HOW MUCH DO I NEED?**

The short answer for most of us is: more! Many of us fall far short of our recommended intake. For most adults, the daily calcium recommendation is somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 milligrams.

## **WHERE CAN I GET CALCIUM?**

Scan food labels to identify high-calcium items. Look for foods and beverages containing at least 20% of the Daily Value (DV). Check out the list on the other side of this handout for the calcium content of a variety of foods and beverages.

## **HOW CAN I BOOST MY CALCIUM INTAKE?**

Drink plain or flavored cows' milk or fortified soy milk with meals.  
Eat pudding, custard, ice cream, or frozen yogurt for dessert.  
Keep fruit-flavored yogurt in the fridge for a quick snack or breakfast.  
Use milk instead of water to make hot chocolate.  
Snack on low-fat cheese with fruit or crackers.  
If you eat cereal bars or energy bars, try calcium-fortified versions.

## **WHAT ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS?**

Supplements are an option if you can't meet your calcium needs by making changes in the types of

food and drink you choose. Calcium content and absorption vary from one supplement to the next. Calcium citrate (e.g., Citracal) is better absorbed than calcium carbonate (e.g., Tums, OsCal). The citrate form can be taken on an empty stomach. Calcium carbonate is best taken after meals. The National Academy of Sciences recommends that no more than 1,000 mg of calcium per day be taken in supplemental form. Remember: the calcium we eat and drink comes packaged with other important nutrients not found in supplements...and with a lot more flavor, too.

## **WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?**

Excess sodium and animal protein increase calcium loss, so go easy on packaged, highly processed foods, and skip high-protein diets, unless medically indicated.

Caffeine increases calcium loss and decreases absorption, so drink extra milk or fortified juice on high-caffeine days.

Vitamin D helps with calcium absorption. Fortified milk and fatty fish like salmon are good sources of vitamin D. Sun exposure stimulates D production in the skin, but the northern half of the US can't rely on this to meet vitamin D needs. Sun exposure may increase skin cancer risk, too.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT CALCIUM OR  
ANOTHER NUTRITION ISSUE?  
CALL (603) 862-2856 TO SCHEDULE AN  
APPOINTMENT WITH OUR  
NUTRITION COUNSELOR.**

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Dairy products supply 75% of all the calcium in the U.S. food supply, but there are other foods that provide significant amounts of calcium as well. Remember, fat content does not affect calcium content. Amounts listed are approximate.

FOOD	SERVING SIZE	CALCIUM (mg)
Yogurt (low fat/nonfat)	1 cup	300-400
Sardines (canned)	3 oz	320
Calcium-fortified orange juice	1 cup	300
Cows' milk (whole/low fat/nonfat)	1 cup	300
Soy milk, fortified	1 cup	300
Chocolate milk (1%)	1 cup	285
Cheese	1 oz	
Swiss		270
Provolone		214
Cheddar		205
American		200
Tofu (firm, processed with calcium sulfate)	½ cup	260
Calcium-fortified cereal	¾ cup	200-250
Salmon (canned, with edible bones)	3 oz	205
Calcium-fortified cereal bar (e.g., Nutri-Grain)	1 bar	200
Frozen yogurt	½ cup	105
Turnip greens (cooked)	½ cup	100
Dried figs	3	80
Almonds (dry roasted)	1 oz	80
Broccoli (raw)	1 cup	40