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Calcium and Healthy Bones

Why is calcium so important?

Did you know that 99% of your body's calcium is stored in your bones and teeth? This calcium makes up your bone bank. Calcium is "deposited" and "withdrawn" from your bone bank daily, based on your body's need for calcium. If your daily diet is low in calcium, calcium is "withdrawn" from your bone bank. Bone is broken down to keep your blood calcium level normal. This happens because calcium plays a critical role in supporting your body's vital functions; such as controlling your blood pressure and maintaining your heartbeat.

Who should get calcium?

It is recommended that everyone, including pregnant or breastfeeding women, consume the daily calcium intake recommended for their age. The amount of calcium you get from your food (the preferred source) plus any calcium supplement (if needed) should be combined to see if you meet the recommended calcium intake in milligrams (mg) per day shown below.

How much calcium is recommended each day?

It is important to know the amount of calcium you need each day. You will find your recommended daily calcium intake on the chart below, listed according to your age and gender.

If this is your age	Then you need this much calcium each day (mg = milligrams)
Birth to 12 months	Supplied by formula or breast milk
1 – 3	700 mg*
4 – 8	1000 mg*
9 – 18	1300 mg*
Men 19 – 70 Women 19 – 50	1000 mg*
Women 51 – 70	1200 mg*

*Recommended Dietary Allowances, Institute of Medicine, 2010

How can I get enough calcium?

It is best to get calcium from the foods you eat. Your body uses calcium best in small amounts (600 mg or less at one time). Spread out the calcium you eat each day by choosing a food with calcium at each meal or snack.

Foods rich in calcium:

- Dairy foods including milk, cheese, and yogurt (choose nonfat or low-fat options)
- Dark green, leafy vegetables (bok choy, broccoli, collard greens, dandelion greens, kale, mustard greens, and turnips greens)
- Canned fish (salmon, sardines) eaten with bones
- Certain nuts such as almonds and soy nuts
- Calcium-fortified foods (foods with calcium added)

How do I read a food label for calcium?

There are many foods that you can eat to get the calcium you need each day. Reading food labels for calcium is easy as 1, 2, 3. It is always important to first find the serving size and then:

1. Find the % calcium per serving
2. Drop the %
3. Add a zero

Serving size	8 ounces
1. Calcium	20%
2. Drop %	20
3. Add 0	200
Calcium content	200 mg in an 8-ounce serving

Is more calcium than the recommended intake better?

There is no benefit for healthy individuals to consume more calcium than recommended. Your health care provider may suggest slightly more calcium for you if you have certain medical conditions or you take a medication that interferes with your body's ability to use calcium. It is important not to consume too much calcium on a regular basis. More calcium is not better and chronic high calcium intakes may even be harmful. Therefore, it is important to speak with your health care provider about your calcium requirements.