



Calcium

What is it and why is it important?

Dairy
UK

Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Roles of calcium
- 4 Importance of calcium for bone health throughout life
- 6 Lifestyle and bone health
- 7 Dairy foods and calcium
- 9 Vitamin D
- 10 Calcium recommendations
- 12 Other food sources of calcium

Introduction

Calcium is an essential mineral. Most of us know that calcium is needed for bone health, but it has other functions in the body too!

Roles of Calcium

Along with bone health, calcium has many other roles in the body, it:



Contributes to normal
**BLOOD
CLOTTING**

Supports normal
**MUSCLE
FUNCTION**



Supports normal energy-yielding
METABOLISM
(the release of energy from foods)



Has a role in the process of
**CELL DIVISION &
SPECIALISATION**



Contributes to normal
NEUROTRANSMISSION
(the delivery of messages between nerve cells)

Supports normal function of
**DIGESTIVE
ENZYMES**



Importance of Calcium for bone health throughout life



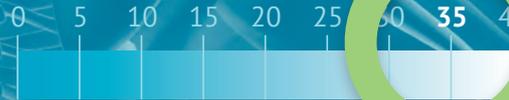
CHILDREN

Calcium is needed for growth and development of bone in children. **Physical activity** is important too!



PREGNANCY & BREASTFEEDING

There is no increase in calcium requirements during pregnancy. Breastfeeding women need an extra 550mg calcium a day.



ADULTS

Bones continue to strengthen until our mid-thirties.



TEENAGERS

Around 90% of the adult skeleton is formed by the age of 18.

Teenage girls need 800mg calcium a day and teenage boys 1000mg a day.



MENOPAUSE

An extra 500mg calcium* is recommended to help reduce loss of bone mineral in **post-menopausal women**.

* Calcium helps to reduce loss of bone mineral in post-menopausal women. Low bone mineral density is a risk factor for osteoporosis.

Lifestyle and bone health

Like muscles, our bones need regular exercise to keep them strong. **Weight-bearing activities**, where our feet and legs support our weight, are particularly good for bones. These include running, skipping and dancing, even brisk walking. Adults should aim for at least **2½ hours per week**, with muscle strengthening activities 2 days a week.

Not smoking and **limiting alcohol** intake are also good for bone health.



At least **2½ hours** per week

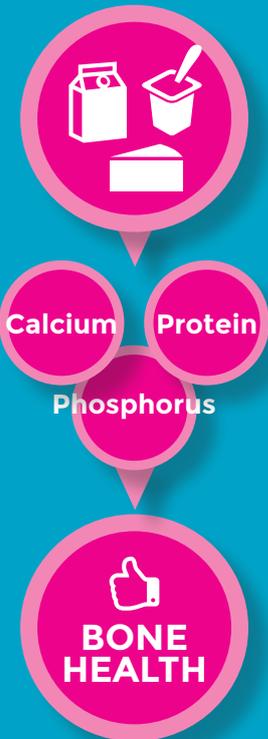
For more information on lifestyle and bone health, check out the Royal Osteoporosis Society's Bone Health Checklist: <https://theros.org.uk/information-and-support/looking-after-your-bones/lifestyle-for-bone-health-checklist/>

Dairy foods and calcium

Including **milk, cheese** and **yogurt** in the diet is a great way to help meet our calcium needs.

The table on page 11 shows the recommended calcium intakes for different ages, as well as the portion sizes that can help meet these needs.

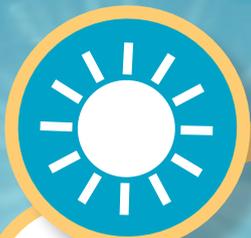
Calcium isn't the only bone-friendly nutrient that milk, cheese and yogurt provide! They also contain **protein** and **phosphorus**, both of which support the maintenance of normal bones.



Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium from foods.

The body makes vitamin D from the **action of direct sunlight on skin**. In the UK this is possible between April and September.



However, between October and March, our bodies can't make enough vitamin D from sunlight so we need to **rely on vitamin D from the diet**.



As there are only a few natural food sources of vitamin D, **all adults and children over the age of one are advised to consider taking a daily supplement of 10µg (micrograms) vitamin D**, especially during autumn and winter.

A daily supplement of 10µg vitamin D is recommended all year round for:

- all pregnant and breastfeeding women
- babies and young children
- those aged 65 years and over
- people with darker skin
- people who spend lots of time indoors.

For more information on vitamin D, visit [The British Dietetic Association's Food Fact Sheet on Vitamin D](#) (link on back page)

Calcium recommendations by age group



Age	Calcium needs (RNI*, mg/day)	Portion sizes	Calcium content (mg)
1-3 years	350	100ml whole/semi-skimmed milk	120
		60g whole plain yogurt	120
4-6 years	450	15g Cheddar cheese	111
		These portion sizes provide approximately 351mg calcium	
		189ml school carton semi-skimmed milk	227
7-10 years	550	80g whole plain yogurt	160
		20g Cheddar cheese	148
		These portion sizes provide approximately 535mg calcium	
11-18 years Male	1000	189ml school carton semi-skimmed milk	227
		125g low-fat plain yogurt	203
		20g Cheddar cheese	148
These portion sizes provide approximately 578mg calcium			
11-18 years Female	800 (extra 550mg during breastfeeding)	284ml semi-skimmed milk	341
		200g low-fat plain yogurt	324
		45g Cheddar cheese	333
These portion sizes provide approximately 998mg calcium			
19 years and over	700 (extra 550mg during breastfeeding)	250ml semi-skimmed milk	300
		200g low-fat plain yogurt	280
		30g Cheddar cheese	222
These portion sizes provide approximately 832mg calcium			
19 years and over	700 (extra 550mg during breastfeeding)	200ml semi-skimmed milk	240
		150g low-fat plain yogurt	243
		30g Cheddar cheese	222
These portion sizes provide approximately 705mg calcium			

* RNI, Reference Nutrient Intake, is a figure set by the Department of Health for the amount of a nutrient that is enough to meet the dietary needs of most people (97.5%).

Other food sources of calcium

per adult portion:



Sardines (with edible bones)
(500mg calcium / 100g canned)



Calcium-fortified bran cereal (99mg calcium / 30g)



*Almonds** (60mg / 25g)



*Sesame seeds** (67mg / 10g)



*Okra** (96mg / 80g)



*Red kidney beans**
(canned) (25mg / tbsp)



Fortified white bread
(64mg / 35g)



*Kale**
(120mg / 80g boiled)

A balanced and varied diet should provide enough calcium to meet our requirements. If you take a calcium supplement, make sure your total intake doesn't exceed 1500mg/day as this may cause stomach pain and diarrhoea.

Children under five years old shouldn't be given whole nuts because of the risk of choking. Those with a medically diagnosed allergy to any of the pictured foods should avoid them.

*However, these foods shouldn't be relied on as your main source of calcium. This is because they contain other compounds which can reduce the amount of calcium absorbed by the body.

Information sources

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Theobald H.E (2005) Dietary calcium and health - Briefing paper. British Nutrition Foundation Nutrition Bulletin 30, 237-277

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Bone health checklist

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Causes of osteoporosis and broken bones

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For details on additional information sources please contact Dairy UK

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