

# Calcium

A registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) can help you set specific nutrition goals and guide you in planning a personalized healthy eating pattern.

To find an RDN in your area, visit "Find an Expert" at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)



You need calcium at every age and stage of life. It builds and maintains strong bones and teeth. It also helps your blood clot and keeps your muscles and nerves working properly. Calcium may even play a role in preventing and lowering high blood pressure.

## How Much Do You Need?

The amount of calcium you need depends on your age:

- Young children need calcium for their growing bones. Nearly half of the body's bones form during the teen years.
- During your twenties and thirties, calcium helps your bones continue to grow stronger.
- Older adults (especially women after menopause) lose calcium from their bones more rapidly. Getting plenty of calcium in your diet and making time for enough exercise can help slow bone loss.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women do not require extra calcium, but they should be sure to get enough from calcium-rich foods that also provide other essential nutrients for mom and baby.

## Age (years) Recommended Daily Calcium (milligrams)

1-3	500 mg
4-8	800 mg
9-18	1,300 mg
19-50	1,000 mg
51+	1,200 mg

## Keeping Bones Healthy and Strong

Over time, people who don't get enough calcium may develop **osteoporosis**. This condition can cause bones to weaken and break more easily. Although it's more common in women, men are also at risk. Along with eating calcium-rich foods, here are ways to help keep your bones strong:

- **Get enough vitamin D.** It helps your body absorb and use calcium. Good sources of vitamin D are some types of mushrooms, fatty fish like tuna and salmon, egg yolks, and fortified foods, such as milk and some yogurts, juices, and cereals. Check the Nutrition Facts panel. Your body also makes its own vitamin D when your skin is exposed to sunlight.
- **Get up and move.** Regular, weight-bearing exercise makes bones stronger. Good activities include brisk walking, jogging, aerobics, dancing, racket sports, and weight lifting.
- **Eat a balanced diet.** Focus on nonfat and low-fat dairy, fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein.
- **Aim for a healthy weight.** If you're trying to lose or maintain your weight, exercise regularly, and be sure to include enough calcium-rich foods and drinks.
- **Don't smoke, and go easy on alcohol.**
- **Talk to your health care provider.** If you are a woman approaching menopause, ask your doctor whether medications or supplements could improve your bone health.



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