



Calcium and your health

Why do I need calcium?

Calcium is one of the building blocks of strong bones and teeth. Getting enough calcium early in life helps build strong bones. Getting enough calcium later in life helps keep bones strong and slows bone loss. It also helps muscles, nerves and hormones work properly.

How much calcium do I need each day?

Recommended amounts of calcium include the total intake from food and any supplements.

Age	Aim for
0-6 months	200 mg
6-12 months	260 mg
1 to 3 years	700 mg
4 to 8 years	1000 mg
9 to 18 years*	1300 mg
19 to 50 years*	1000 mg
51 to 70 years	Male: 1000 mg Female: 1200 mg
Over 70 years	1200 mg

mg = milligram

*Including those who are pregnant or breastfeeding

Which foods contain calcium?

Foods that are high in calcium include:

- Milk and dairy products such as yogurt and cheese
- Fortified plant-based beverages such as fortified soy beverage
- Tofu made with calcium sulfate
- Canned fish with bones such as salmon and sardines

Other sources of calcium include:

- Nuts and seeds such as almonds and sesame seeds
- Beans such as white beans and navy beans
- Dark green leafy vegetables such as kale and Chinese cabbage

Aim to include several of these foods each day to meet your calcium needs. If you don't eat foods

high in calcium daily, it may be hard to meet your needs.

What affects how much calcium is absorbed?

Many factors affect how much calcium is absorbed from the foods you eat. Your body naturally absorbs more calcium during times of bone growth, such as during childhood and pregnancy. Having enough vitamin D helps your body better absorb calcium from foods.

Should I take a supplement?

Use the food sources table below to find out how much calcium you are getting from food. For foods that have a label, check the nutrition facts table to see how much calcium the food contains. You can also use the calcium calculator on the Osteoporosis Canada website (see For More Information). If you are not getting enough calcium, try eating more foods that contain it. If you find it hard to get enough calcium from food, you can take a supplement to help meet your needs.

Many multivitamins contain both calcium and vitamin D. If you take a multivitamin, check the label to see if it has calcium. Do not take more than the recommended amount of calcium from food and supplements.

Talk to a dietitian, pharmacist, or your health care provider if you have questions about the right amount and type of supplement that is best for you.

For more information

- [HealthLinkBC File #68n Vitamin D and your health](#)
- [Osteoporosis Canada Calcium Calculator](#)
- Calcium content of specific foods: [Canadian Nutrient File](#)
- Infant and toddler feeding guidelines:
 - [Baby's Best Chance](#)
 - [Toddler's First Steps](#)

For more nutrition information, call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered dietitian.

Food sources of calcium

Food	Serving size	Amount of calcium (mg)
Excellent source of calcium (250 mg or more)*		
Dried fish, smelt	35 g (1 oz)	560
Cheese, semi-hard such as cheddar and mozzarella	50 g (1 ½ oz)	365
Milk	250 mL (1 cup)	310
Fortified plant-based beverage such as soy, almond or oat**	250 mL (1 cup)	310
Fortified orange juice	250 mL (1 cup)	310
Buttermilk	250 mL (1 cup)	300
Sardines, Atlantic, canned with bones	75 g (2 ½ oz)	286
Yogurt	175 g (¾ cup)	272
Kefir	250 mL (1 cup)	267
Tofu, made with calcium sulphate	150 g (5 oz)	256
Good source of calcium (150 to 249 mg)*		
Salmon, pink, canned with bones	75 g (2 ½ oz)	212
Edamame, cooked	175 mL (¾ cup)	207
Mackerel, canned	75 g (2 ½ oz)	181
Blackstrap molasses	15 mL (1 tbsp)	179
Source of calcium (50 to 149 mg)*		
Tempeh, cooked	150 g (5 oz)	144
Chia seeds	30 mL (2 tbsp)	136
Tahini (sesame seed butter)	30 mL (2 tbsp)	130
White beans, cooked	175 mL (¾ cup)	119
Almond butter	30 mL (2 tbsp)	113
Turnip greens, cooked	125 mL (½ cup)	104
Almonds, dry roasted	60 mL (¼ cup)	94
Navy beans, cooked	175 mL (¾ cup)	93
Mustard greens, cooked	125 mL (½ cup)	87
Chinese cabbage/bok choy, cooked	125 mL (½ cup)	84
Octopus	75 g (2 ½ oz)	80
Cottage cheese, 1%	125 mL (½ cup)	73
Mollusks, clam	75 g (2 ½ oz)	69
Naan	1 small (100g)	69
Okra, cooked	125 mL (½ cup)	65
Seaweed, wakame, raw	125 mL (½ cup)	63
Bread	2 slices (70g)	60
Chickpeas, cooked or canned	175 mL (¾ cup)	59
Orange	1 medium	52
Kale, raw	125 mL (½ cup)	53
Seaweed, agar, dry	125 mL (½ cup)	50

mL = milliliter, g = gram, tbsp = tablespoon, mg = milligram

Source: Canadian Nutrient File 2015

*Categories are based on Canada's food labelling regulations for nutrient claims

**Fortified plant-based beverages are not recommended for children under 2 years of age

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call 8-1-1 (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call 7-1-1. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.