

Calcium-Rich Foods

What is calcium? - Calcium is an essential nutrient. The body stores more than 99% of calcium in the bones & teeth to help make & keep them strong. The body also needs calcium for muscles & blood vessels contract & expand, to secrete hormones & enzymes, and to send messages through the nervous system.

Why is calcium important in our diet? – Insufficient calcium in our diet may contribute to bone fractures, osteoporosis, and cardiovascular issues.

How much calcium do I need? – The recommendation for women ages 51-70 is 1,200 mg/day; for men ages 51-70 it is 1,000 mg/day. All adults 70 and older should aim for 1,200 mg/day. In addition to getting enough calcium, adequate Vitamin D is needed for calcium to be absorbed. Food sources of vitamin D include fatty fish, cod liver oil, egg yolks, and fortified milk. Many calcium-rich foods are also fortified with Vitamin D and our bodies can produce Vitamin D with natural sunlight.

Should I take a calcium supplement? – It is recommended to get our calcium from food first, as foods offer a variety of important nutrients. Speak to your doctor if you feel you are at a risk of calcium deficiency. Calcium Carbonate and Calcium Citrate are the most common forms of supplements. Calcium carbonate needs stomach acid for absorption, so it should be taken with food. Calcium citrate can be taken with or without food. No more than 500 mg of calcium should be taken in a single dose. Also, it is not necessary to buy expensive supplements. Store brands are often of high quality. The letters "USP" or "UL" ensure quality.

What foods provide calcium? – Dietary Sources of calcium include dairy products such as milk, yogurt, cheese, and milk-based desserts. Dairy foods are also good sources of protein and other micronutrients important for bone health. Other sources of calcium include:

- Green vegetables like broccoli, curly kale, and Bok choy
- Some fruits such as oranges, apricots, and dried figs
- Canned fish with soft, edible bones (the calcium is in the bones) such as sardines & salmon
- Nuts, especially almonds
- Calcium-set Tofu

Some calcium-fortified bread, cereals, fruit juices, soy beverages and several brands of mineral water also contain significant amounts of calcium. Check food labels.

Meals on Wheels – A hot, nutritious meal is the basis of the Meals on Wheels Program. Each of our meals meets at least 1/3 of the Daily Recommended Dietary Allowance for the population we serve. A carton of low-fat milk is provided with each hot meal. With milk, the meals contain on average ~420 mg of calcium.

Tips for getting more calcium in your diet:

- Buy low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, and cheese. Use milk to cook your hot cereals or in soups; top a baked potato with yogurt; buy strong flavored cheese (like feta or blue cheese); you'll use less, get more flavor & save on calories & fat.
- Calcium fortified orange juice is an option. A 4 oz. juice glass not only counts as a fruit serving, but it provides ~175 mg of calcium.
- Cooked, dark, leafy greens (like kale, spinach, collards) can also help meet your daily calcium needs. One cup of cooked kale provides ~100 mg of calcium.
- Choose a milk-based dessert, like pudding, for added calcium intake.
- Try calcium-fortified alternative milks, like soy or almond milk, if you do not like dairy or are lactose free. 1 cup of a fortified almond milk can provide ~450 mg of calcium. Check labels for calcium.

Info. adapted from: *The Best Calcium-Rich Foods for Non-Meat Eaters*. Environmental Nutrition. Volume 45; Issue 5; May 2022.

Tri-Valley receives federal financial support under the Older Americans Act provided by the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs.