

ALL ABOUT CALCIUM

Calcium is the most abundant mineral in the body. The richest sources of calcium are from dairy products such as milk and cheese. Other good sources include nuts, canned fish with bones, leafy vegetables and dried fruits. Alternative sources of foods with fortified calcium include soy or rice milk.

Where do I get calcium from?

Calcium is found in a variety of foods such as dairy products including milk, yogurt and cheese, the soft edible bones in canned fish (e.g. sardines & salmon), leafy green vegetables, almonds and calcium fortified soy, rice, oat and nut milks – check that calcium has been added to make calcium levels at least 250 mg per 250 ml (1 cup) serve.

It is interesting to note that low fat varieties are often higher in calcium. Calcium supplements may be beneficial if a diet is low in calcium, such as for people with low calorie intakes, milk allergies and lactose intolerance, or when there are increased requirements, in pregnancy, lactation and seniors. Fortified foods may also assist with calcium intake, including soy milk, citrus drinks, bread and breakfast cereals. Not all foods made from milk are good sources of calcium. Butter and cream are low in calcium.

Getting the most out of your Calcium

There are many factors that may affect the absorption of the calcium in the intestine. Some can reduce absorption whilst others can increase it.

FACTORS THAT CAN REDUCE CALCIUM ABSORPTION IN THE GUT

- Very high intake dietary fibre
- Oxalic acid – found in high concentrations in spinach and in smaller amounts in sweet potatoes and dried beans.

FACTORS THAT CAN INCREASE CALCIUM ABSORPTION IN THE GUT

- Lactose – sugar naturally found in milk
- Casein – protein found in milk and dairy products
- Vitamin D – produced in our skin on exposure to sunlight

Dairy products are considered the best sources of calcium because they naturally contain high amounts of calcium along with lactose and casein that can assist absorption. Vitamin D – Essential for Adequate Calcium Absorption

How do I include enough Calcium in my diet?

Here are some easy ideas to include calcium rich foods in a healthy, balanced diet:

- Start your day with breakfast cereal and milk
- Wake up to a home-made banana, mango or strawberry smoothie
- Add some cheese on your toast or to a sandwich
- Sprinkle some cheese on your potato
- Reach for a yogurt at midmorning snack to keep you going until lunch
- Have some fresh fruit and yogurt for dessert
- Enjoy a warm cup of milk before bed

IF DAIRY FOODS ARE NOT CONSUMED THERE ARE MANY OTHER WAYS TO INCORPORATE CALCIUM INTO YOUR DIET

- Use calcium-enriched soymilk on your breakfast cereal or in a smoothie
- Have sardines and tomato on toast for breakfast
- Use calcium-fortified bread to make a sandwich
- Snack on a handful of almonds

Ideas to boost Kid's Calcium intake

The latest 2007 National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey found that many children are not meeting their calcium requirement, particularly teenage girls. This is disappointing when we know that it is a critical time, where they are building their peak bone mass, giving them the best chance of having healthy bones throughout life. The survey also found that milk (and dairy) consumption decreased as children get older, often being replaced by nutrient-poor soft drinks.

Try these ways to help get your kids to get more calcium in their day:

- Encourage a glass of reduced fat milk instead of soft drink or juice. If you cannot get them to drink plain milk, try enticing them with a smoothie or simply just flavouring it. Although milk flavourings can add sugar (up to 2 teaspoons) which is significantly less than that found in soft drinks (containing at least 8 teaspoons/375mL) and unlike milk drinks, provide little other nutrients. Some flavouring options also provide additional goodies that can even further boost calcium intake and therefore improve the nutritional value of the milk itself.
- Add milk back in other ways such as making porridge on milk rather than water, adding skim milk powder to creamy soups and using reduced fat evaporated milk to creamy pasta sauces.
- Add low fat cheese where-ever you can such as on sandwiches, melted on toast or mini pizzas, or even mixed into scrambled eggs.
- Offer snacks of almonds mixed with dried fruit, yoghurt or even a natural yoghurt based dip with vegetable sticks.
- Try and include salmon each week, either grilled or baked for dinner or having tinned salmon on sandwiches. Salmon is also fantastic as it is rich in Vitamin D, essential to assist calcium absorption.
- Include more dark greens regularly such as spinach and broccoli as part of the daily intake of five vegetables.