

CALCIUM

Calcium is an essential mineral required for the growth and maintenance of bones and teeth, as well as proper functioning of the muscular and cardiovascular systems. The average adult's weight is made up of about 2% calcium, with most of this found in the skeleton and teeth and the rest stored in the tissues or blood. Our bodies cannot make calcium so it must come from our diets. However, according to the 2012 Australian Health Survey, nearly three quarters of females (73%) and half of all males (51%) aged 2 years and over did not meet the dietary requirements for calcium.



ROLE OF CALCIUM

- Strengthening bones and teeth
- Regulating muscle functioning, such as contracting and relaxation
- Regulating heart function
- Blood clotting
- Transmission of nervous system messages
- Enzyme function

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

SOURCES

FOOD	SERVE	CALCIUM (mg)
Yoghurt, Natural	200g tub	390
Canned Sardines	100g	380
Milk, Reduced Fat	250ml	352
Sesame Seeds	1/4 cup	351
Tofu	100g	350
Cheese	40g (2 slices)	327
Milk, Regular	250ml	285
Green Soybeans, Boiled	1 cup	261
Spinach, Cooked	1 cup	245
Tinned Red Salmon	100g	220
Fortified Cereal	30g	200
Chia Seeds	30g	180
Cottage Cheese	200g	166
Bok Choy, Steamed	1 cup	158
Almonds	50g	132
Navy Beans	1 cup	125
Tempeh	100g	111
Kale, Cooked	1 cup	93
Cinnamon	1 tbl	78
Sweet Potato	1 cup	76
Orange, Cut Up	1 cup	72
Broccoli, Cooked	1 cup	62
Medjool Dates	3 dates	46

AGE	FEMALES	MALES
1 - 3 yrs	500 mg/day	500 mg/day
4 - 8 yrs	700 mg/day	700 mg/day
9 - 13 yrs	1000 - 1300 mg/day	1000 - 1300 mg/day
14 - 18 yrs	1300 mg/day	1300 mg/day
19 - 50 yrs	1000 mg/day	1000 mg/day
51 - 70 yrs	1300 mg/day	1000 mg/day

Bones increase in size and mass during childhood and adolescence, reaching peak bone mass around age 30. The greater the peak bone mass, the longer one can delay serious bone loss with increasing age. Everyone should therefore consume adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D throughout childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. Adults only absorb about 30% of the calcium they consume. Growing children and pregnant women will absorb 50% of the calcium they consume due to the release of certain hormones, but these are critical times to monitor calcium intake. It is very difficult to overdose on calcium; if there is an excess of calcium in the blood, the body will start removing it from the body through the bowel.

"The vitamin D link - Vitamin D is important for bone health because it helps the body absorb calcium."



TIPS FOR INCREASING YOUR CALCIUM INTAKE

- Dairy foods contain a high level of calcium which is easily absorbed – aim for 3 serves per day.
- Try canned salmon or sardines which contain small bones rich in calcium.
- Use yoghurt in dressings, dips, soups or desserts.
- Stock your freezer with frozen spinach and use it to bulk up savory dishes such as quiches, omelets, pasta dishes, risottos, stews, soups etc.
- Try tofu or tempeh in a stir-fry as an alternative to meat.
- Include broccoli, mustard cabbage, bok choy, silver beet, kale, cucumber, celery and chickpeas.
- Snack on almonds, dried figs and dried apricots.
- Try tahini (ground sesame seed paste) in sauces, dressing, on toast or with cut up fresh fruit.

CALCIUM DEFICIENCY

Calcium is continually lost from your body each day through your skin, nails, sweat and urine. Bones act like a calcium bank, storing calcium and releasing it into the blood stream when needed. If your calcium intake is too low and there are more withdrawals than deposits from your calcium bone bank, you risk losing bone strength. If calcium intake is consistently low, the body will eventually remove so much calcium from the skeleton that the bones will become weak and brittle. Other lifestyle factors that increase the risk of deficiency include:

- Having a low body weight
- High salt diet
- Smoking
- More than six (6) caffeinated beverages per day
- Low levels of physical activity
- Low vitamin D levels
- Excessive alcohol intake
- Very high fibre intake



OSTEOPOROSIS

Translated from Greek, osteoporosis literally means 'porous bones', and is the result of both genetic and environmental factors. It is a degenerative disease that causes the bones to lose their calcium and mineral mass, resulting in fragile and brittle bones more prone to fractures. In Australia, two in three women and one in three men over the age of 60 will suffer from a broken bone due to osteoporosis. It is more common in females and can start a year or two before menopause, carrying on throughout the rest of their lives, due to the reduction in hormone production. Although osteoporosis is usually thought of as a condition of old age, the condition usually begins much earlier. There are many thousands of people in Australia with osteoporosis who are unaware they have it, even when it's quite advanced.

PREVENTION OF OSTEOPOROSIS

CALCIUM INTAKE:

Maintain an adequate intake of calcium by including a range of calcium-rich foods in your diet as well as having an overall healthy diet, including plenty of vegetables and fruits.

VITAMIN D:

About 10 minutes of sunlight each day (depending on your skin type and the season) could help produce enough vitamin D to assist with calcium uptake into the body.

EXERCISE:

Participate in regular weight-bearing exercise which forces you to work against gravity such as jogging, playing sport, hiking, weight training, boxing and dancing. This creates the stimulus for bone re-growth.

OTHER HEALTHY HABITS:

Be a non-smoker and consume alcohol in moderation. Avoid drinking too much soft drink, particularly cola-based drinks, as it has been linked to lower bone mineral density.



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