

CALCIUM AND BONE HEALTH

Nutrition News You Can Use



Learn how to nourish your bones to help keep them strong and healthy

Having strong bones is essential to having a strong healthy body. That's why bone health has been such a frequent topic in the news. We now know that bone health is very important at all ages. Our bones provide support and protection for the rest of our bodies. By building strong bones, and keeping them strong, we can prevent long-lasting, painful health problems. One of the most important ways to build and maintain healthy bones is by getting enough calcium every day.

The Building Block of Bone

Calcium is the building block of bone. Calcium is also used in many other functions in our bodies. This can create a competition for calcium that can be a problem for your bones. The competition works like this. If you don't get enough calcium in your diet, then your body will 'borrow' the calcium it needs from your bones. Over time if you don't replace the calcium borrowed from the bones, then bones weaken. This weakening of the bones can lead to osteoporosis, a serious condition that can result in fractures and curvature of the spine. However, the good news is that by getting enough calcium each day, you can help keep your bones strong.

How Much Calcium Do I Need?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend 2 to 3 servings of calcium rich foods every day. The amount of calcium that each person needs depends on their age. Adults under 50 generally need about 1,000 milligrams (mg) per day. Older adults who are more prone to broken bones need about 1,200 mg per day. Teenagers, who are growing rapidly, need as much as 1,500 mg per day to help build strong bones.

Where Can I Find Calcium?

Low fat dairy products like milk, cheese,

and yogurt are good sources of calcium. For example, an 8 ounce glass of milk has about 300 mg. If you have the full recommendation of 3 servings of dairy every day, that adds up to about 90% of the recommended amount for a healthy adult. Even if you have your dairy, it's a good idea to get calcium from other sources in your diet. Also, if dairy is not an option because you're allergic, are lactose intolerant or just don't enjoy dairy products, then getting your calcium from other foods or from supplements is even more important.

Non-Dairy Calcium Rich Foods

Fortunately, many non dairy products can help you get enough calcium in your diet. The following foods all contain calcium.

Green leafy vegetables: Broccoli, kale, bok choy, and collard greens.

Beans and nuts: Black eyed peas, lentils, and almonds.

Fortified foods: Tofu and other soy products like soy milks, yogurts, and cheeses. Fortified breads, cereals, energy bars, and juices.

Seafood: Certain fish, such as canned sardines, also provide calcium when eaten with the bones.

How do I make the most of the calcium I eat?

Get enough Vitamin D

Vitamin D is also important for bone health since it helps your body to absorb calcium. Recent studies suggest that many people do not get enough vitamin D so they're not able to make the most of the calcium in their diets. The Vitamin D in your body comes from three sources:

- Your body actually makes its own vitamin D when exposed to sunlight.
- Vitamin D is found naturally in some fish (like salmon and tuna).
- Vitamin D is also added to many fortified



Our dietitians receive hundreds of questions each year about a wide variety of nutrition topics. Their timely and trustworthy insights and ideas can help you and your family live healthier lives.

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foods such as milk and other dairy products, breakfast cereals and orange juice.

Experts recommend that adults under 50 get at least 200 International Units (IU) of vitamin D each day. Adults over 50 are generally advised to get much more (about 400 to 600 IU). To help get enough, spend a little time in the sun (but not too much!), try to eat foods with vitamin D and consider taking a multivitamin supplement.

Supplementing Your Diet

If you have considered supplements as an option to help get enough calcium and vitamin D, there are many to choose from. Many supplements are available at grocery stores or pharmacies. Since each person's needs are not the same, if you are considering a supplement, it is best to speak with your doctor and a registered dietitian to discuss which supplement and dosage is right for you. Also, keep in mind that supplements should not be used to replace food as your main source of calcium or vitamin D. Most of the vitamins and minerals in your diet should come from a variety of foods each day.

Exercise and Bone Health

'Weight bearing exercise' is essential to bone health. Weight bearing exercises include walking, stair climbing and dancing, where your weight is supported by your bones. This type of exercise has been shown to increase bone density. Non weight bearing exercises like swimming or bicycle riding do not have the same effect. But the good news is that by walking, jogging, doing aerobics, climbing stairs, dancing, playing tennis or lifting weights you can help strengthen your bones. Weight bearing exercises have also been shown to help build muscle strength, coordination and balance which can help prevent falls and fractures when we get older.

Tasty ways to get more calcium

There are many great ways to get more calcium in your diet:

- Make oatmeal, canned soup, or hot chocolate with low fat or skim milk instead of water.

- Add broccoli to pasta dishes.
- Use white beans, kale, and tofu for a calcium packed vegetarian stew.
- Snack on string cheese or pudding.
- Add dry milk powder to sauces and gravies.
- Sprinkle almonds on top of salads.
- Try smoothies made with skim, soy or low-fat milk or yogurt.
- Top baked potatoes, salads, soups, and stews with low-fat shredded cheese.
- Try skim milk in your coffee.

Vegetarian Foods for stronger bones

Research has shown that diets high in animal based proteins, like red meat, and lower in plant based foods can lead to weaker bones. That doesn't mean that we should all become Vegetarians. But we should all try to avoid eating too much meat while making sure to eat enough vegetables, fruits and plant based proteins from beans, peas, nuts and seeds. This advice has been shown to have many positive health benefits. Now stronger bones can be added to the list.

An Investment For The Future

Throughout our lives there is a delicate balance between bone growth and bone loss. During childhood and adolescence, bones are growing their fastest. As you grow into adulthood new bone growth slows and bone loss can begin. This is why it's so important to lay a strong foundation with proper nutrition and exercise when you are younger.

Talking to your Doctor about Bone Health.

Bone loss can be a serious condition. Talk to your doctor to determine your risk. If you are at risk, ask your doctor if you need a bone density test — a quick and totally painless way to determine the health of your bones. Your doctor and a dietitian can help you take the right steps towards healthier bones.



Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you.