



Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Proposed publication date: Mar. 27, 2023

Content provided by: Alberta Health Services

Why calcium matters

Calcium keeps your bones and muscles—including your heart—healthy and strong. Your body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium. People who do not get enough calcium and vitamin D throughout life have an increased chance of having thin and brittle bones (osteoporosis) in their later years. Thin and brittle bones break easily and can lead to serious injuries. This is why it is important for you to get enough calcium and vitamin D at every age.

Your body also uses vitamin D to help your muscles absorb calcium and work well. If your muscles don't get enough calcium, then they can cramp, hurt, or feel weak. You may have long-term (chronic) muscle aches and pains.

How much calcium do you need?

How much calcium you need each day changes as you age. Here are the recommended dietary allowances (RDAs) for calcium:

- Ages one to three years: 700 milligrams
- Ages four to eight years: 1,000 milligrams
- Ages nine to 18 years: 1,300 milligrams
- Ages 19 to 50 years: 1,000 milligrams
- Males 51 to 70 years: 1,000 milligrams
- Females 51 to 70 years: 1,200 milligrams
- Ages 71 and older: 1,200 milligrams

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, you need the same amount of calcium as other people your age.

How can you get enough calcium?

Calcium is in foods such as milk, cheese, and yogurt. Vegetables such as broccoli, kale, and Chinese cabbage also contain calcium. You can also get calcium if you eat the soft edible bones in canned sardines and canned salmon. Foods with added (fortified) calcium include some cereals, juices, soy beverages, and tofu. The food label will show how much calcium was added.

You can figure out how much calcium is in a food by looking at the percent daily value section on the nutrition facts label. The food label assumes the daily value of calcium is 1,100 mg. If one serving of a food has a daily value of 20 per cent of calcium, that food has 220 mg of calcium in one serving.

Two common calcium supplements are calcium citrate and calcium carbonate. Calcium carbonate is best absorbed when it is taken with food. Calcium citrate can be absorbed well with or without food. Spreading calcium out over the course of the day can reduce stomach upset and allows your body to absorb it better. Try not to take more than 500 mg of calcium supplement at one time.

For more information, call Health Link toll-free at 811.