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URL of this page: <https://medlineplus.gov/calcium.html>

Calcium

What is calcium and why do I need it?

Calcium is a **mineral** [<https://medlineplus.gov/minerals.html>] , a nutrient that you need (in small amounts) to keep your body healthy. You have more calcium in your body than any other mineral.

Calcium has many important jobs:

- To build and maintain strong bones. Your body stores almost all of its calcium in your bones and teeth to keep them strong.
- To help your muscles move.
- To help your nerves to carry messages between your brain and the rest of your body.
- To help your blood vessels move blood throughout your body.
- To help release hormones that affect many functions in your body.

Not getting enough calcium can cause several conditions, including:

- **Osteoporosis** [<https://medlineplus.gov/osteoporosis.html>] , a disease which can make your bones weaker and more likely to break.
- **Rickets** [<https://medlineplus.gov/rickets.html>] , a disease in children that causes soft, weak bones.
- **Osteomalacia**, a condition which causes soft bones in children and adults.

How do I get calcium?

You can get calcium from foods and supplements. You may be able to get enough calcium by eating a variety of foods, including:

- Dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yogurt. These are the main food sources of calcium for most people in the United States.
- Leafy, green vegetables such as kale, broccoli, and Chinese cabbage (bok choy).
- Fish with soft bones that you can eat, such as canned sardines and salmon.
- Calcium-enriched foods such as breakfast cereals, fruit juices, soy and rice drinks, and tofu. The **product labels** [<https://medlineplus.gov/foodlabeling.html>] for these foods will show how much calcium they have.

Calcium is available in supplements. It is also included in many multivitamins. The two main forms of calcium supplements are calcium carbonate and calcium citrate:

- **Calcium carbonate** is absorbed best when taken with food. Some over-the-counter antacids, such as Tums and Rolaids, also contain calcium carbonate.
- **Calcium citrate** is absorbed well on an empty stomach or a full stomach. People with low levels of stomach acid absorb calcium citrate more easily than calcium carbonate.

Calcium is absorbed best when you take 500 mg or less at one time. If you are taking more than that amount each day, take a smaller dose twice a day rather than taking it all at once.

Calcium supplements might cause gas [<https://medlineplus.gov/gas.html>] , bloating, and constipation [<https://medlineplus.gov/constipation.html>] in some people. If you have any of these symptoms, you could try:

- Spreading out the calcium dose throughout the day
- Taking it with meals
- Switching the form of calcium you take

How much calcium do I need?

The amount of calcium you need each day depends on your age and other factors. The recommended amounts, in milligrams (mg), are:

- Birth to 6 months: 200 mg
- Infants 7-12 months: 260 mg
- Children 1-3 years: 700 mg
- Children 4-8 years: 1,000 mg
- Children 9-13 years: 1,300 mg
- Teens 14-18 years: 1,300 mg
- Adults 19-50 years: 1,000 mg
- Adult men 51-70 years: 1,000 mg
- Adult women 51-70 years: 1,200 mg
- Adults 71 years and older: 1,200 mg
- Pregnant and breastfeeding teens: 1,300 mg
- Pregnant and breastfeeding adults: 1,000 mg


Certain people may have trouble getting enough calcium, including:

- Children and teens age 4 to 18 years
- People who are Black or Asian
- Adults age 50 years and older living in poverty
- Postmenopausal women; your body absorbs and retains less calcium after menopause
- People who don't drink milk or eat other dairy products



Check with your health care provider to see if you need to take calcium supplements, and if so, how much you should take. Your provider may want to first do a calcium blood test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/calcium-blood-test/>] to see if you are getting enough of it.

NIH: National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements


Start Here

- Calcium [<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Calcium-Consumer/>]  (National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements)
Also in Spanish [<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Calcium-DatosEnEspanol/>]
- Calcium and Vitamin D [<https://www.bonehealthandosteoporosis.org/patients/treatment/calciumvitamin-d/>]
(Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation)

Diagnosis and Tests

- Calcium Blood Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/calcium-blood-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-calcio-en-la-sangre/>]
- Calcium in Urine Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/calcium-in-urine-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-calcio-en-orina/>]


Related Issues

- Calcium and Calcium Supplements: Achieving the Right Balance [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/calcium-supplements/art-20047097?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/calcium-supplements/art-20047097?p=1>]
- Calcium and Vitamin D: Important for Bone Health [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/calcium-and-vitamin-d-important-bone-health>]  (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/informacion-de-salud/el-calcio-y-la-vitamina-D-importantes-para-la-salud-de-los-huesos>]
- Calcium Supplements: A Risk Factor for Heart Attack? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-attack/expert-answers/calcium-supplements/FAQ-20058352?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/heart-attack/expert-answers/calcium-supplements/faq-20058352?p=1>]

Specifics

- Hypercalcemia [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hypercalcemia/symptoms-causes/syc-20355523?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)

Genetics

- Idiopathic infantile hypercalcemia: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/idiopathic-infantile-hypercalcemia>]  (National Library of Medicine)




Health Check Tools

- Calcium Calculator [<https://www.osteoporosis.foundation/educational-hub/topic/calcium-calculator>] (International Osteoporosis Foundation)

Test Your Knowledge

- Test Your Bone-Health Diet Knowledge [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/000490_11.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/000490_71.htm]

Clinical Trials




- ClinicalTrials.gov: Calcium, Dietary [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?intr=dietary+calcium&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Hypercalcemia [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Hypercalcemia%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Hypocalcemia [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Hypocalcemia%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles


References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Calcium Supplementation in Pregnancy: A Systematic Review of Clinical Studies. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40731825>]
- Article: The determinants of self-care behaviors and calcium-vitamin D intake in elderly... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40715503>]
- Article: Food insecurity and muscle health: exploring the role of protein, vitamin... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40713535>]
- Calcium -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Calcium%2C+Dietary%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/>]
- Food and Nutrition Information Center [<https://www.nal.usda.gov/programs/fnic>]
- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/portal-en-espanol>]
- National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements [<https://ods.od.nih.gov/>] 

Children

- Calcium [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/calcium.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/calcium.html>]
- Kids and Their Bones [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/kids-and-their-bones>]  (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/informacion-de-salud/la-salud-de-los-huesos-de-los-ninos>]
- Low Calcium in Babies (Hypocalcemia) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/hypocalcemia.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/hypocalcemia.html>]

Patient Handouts

- Calcium in diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002412.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/002412.htm>]
- Calcium supplements [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007477.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/007477.htm>]
- Calcium, vitamin D, and your bones [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000490.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000490.htm>]
- Hypercalcemia - discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000044.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000044.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Calcium - ionized [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003486.htm>]
- Calcium - urine [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003603.htm>]
- Calcium blood test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003477.htm>]
- Calcium in diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002412.htm>]
- Calcium supplements [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007477.htm>]

Calcium, vitamin D, and your bones [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000490.htm>]

Hypercalcemia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000365.htm>]

Hypercalcemia - discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000044.htm>]

Low calcium level - infants [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007229.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Fluid and Electrolyte Balance [<https://medlineplus.gov/fluidandelectrolytebalance.html>]

Minerals [<https://medlineplus.gov/minerals.html>]

Osteoporosis [<https://medlineplus.gov/osteoporosis.html>]

Vitamins [<https://medlineplus.gov/vitamins.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Calcium* is the NIH Office of Dietary Supplements [<https://ods.od.nih.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/calcium.html>] on *Calcium*

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