

What is Calcium and What Does it Do?

Calcium is a mineral that is necessary for life and is an essential nutrient during pregnancy and lactation. Calcium is needed during pregnancy to help your baby build strong, healthy bones and teeth. It also helps keep your bones strong. Aim for 3-4 servings of calcium rich foods per day. If you are not able to meet your needs through food, you may choose a calcium supplement.

If you are at increased risk for high blood pressure, extra calcium in your diet may help. Talk to your Doctor or Dietitian for more information.

Sources of Calcium

Calcium-Rich Food Sources

Food is the best source of calcium. Dairy products, such as low-fat and non-fat milk, yogurt and cheese are high in calcium. Certain green vegetables and other foods contain calcium in smaller amounts. Some juices, breakfast foods, soymilk, cereals, snacks, breads and bottled water have calcium that has been added.

Dietary Recommended Intake (DRI's)

Age Group	Recommended Dietary Allowance (per day)	Upper Limit
Girls 14-18 years	1300 mg-same in pregnancy and lactation	3000 mg
Women 19-50 years	1000 mg-same in pregnancy and lactation	2500 mg

Calcium Supplements

Amount of calcium: the amount of elemental calcium in each tablet is what counts, e.g., a 1250mg tablet may only have 500mg of elemental calcium. Use this number when estimating your calcium intake.

Convenience: calcium carbonate must be taken with food. Other forms of calcium (like calcium citrate) can be taken at any time.

Personal preference: calcium comes in tablets, chewable tablets, soft chews and tablets you can dissolve in water.

Price: compare brands and prices, noting the amount of elemental calcium per tablet.

Size and safety: ask the pharmacist about tablet size if you are not able to see through the bottle. Look for a DIN (drug identification number) or a NPN (natural product number) on the label. Health Canada sets standards for content and quality of supplements.

1000 mg Calcium: 1 cup milk, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup fruit flavoured yogurt, 50 gram cheese (4 dice) and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup broccoli, 2 eggs.

1500 mg Calcium: 2 cups low fat or soymilk, 50-gram cheddar cheese, 1 orange, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup almonds, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plain yogurt, and 1 tbsp Parmesan cheese.

The following chart lists the amount of calcium found in many common foods.

Foods containing 50 mg of calcium	
bread	2 slices
broccoli, cooked	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup
kidney beans, lima beans, lentils	1 cup
orange (fruit not juice)	1 medium size
tahini	2 tbsp
Foods containing 75 mg of calcium	
bok choy or kale, cooked	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup
chickpeas	1 cup
cottage cheese (regular or low fat)	1 cup
ice cream	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup
parmesan cheese	1 tbsp
almonds	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup
Foods containing 150 mg of calcium	
baked beans, soybeans, white beans	1 cup
ice milk, frozen yogurt (regular or low fat)	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup
pancakes or waffles, made with milk	3 medium size
pudding, made with milk	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup
soft and semi-soft cheese such as feta, mozzarella, camembert (regular or low fat)	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inch cube
soup, made with milk	1 cup
tofu, made with calcium	3 oz
Foods containing 250 mg of calcium	
firm cheese such as cheddar, swiss, or gouda (regular or low fat)	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inch cube
processed cheese slices (regular or low fat)	2 slices
salmon, canned with bones	$\frac{1}{2}$ can
sardines, canned with bones	$\frac{1}{2}$ can
yogurt, fruit flavored (regular or low fat)*	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup
Foods containing 300 mg of calcium	
milk - skim, 1%, 2%, whole, buttermilk, chocolate*	1 cup
calcium - fortified beverages (e.g., soy, rice)	1 cup
skim milk powder	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup
yogurt, plain (regular or low fat)*	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup

*add 100 mg for each portion of calcium-enriched milk or yogurt