

All About Calcium

What is Calcium and What Does it Do?

Calcium is a mineral that is necessary for life. Calcium builds bones and keeps them strong. It is also necessary for nerves and muscles to function normally, and we need it for our skin, nails, and hair. Calcium is stored in our bones and teeth, but we can't produce new calcium. So if we don't eat enough, the body takes it from the bones, leaving them more fragile. That's why it's important to replace calcium from the food we eat.

How Much Calcium Do You Need?

Men and women over age 51 need 1,200 mg of calcium daily.

How Do I Know How Much Calcium I'm Getting?

To find out how much calcium is in packaged food, check the nutrition facts label. It will list a percentage based on a daily value of 1000 mg. Calcium listed as 30% means the food has 300 mg of calcium per serving.

Calcium-Rich Food Sources

Food is the best source of calcium. Dairy products, such as milk, yogurt and cheese are high in calcium. Green vegetables such as broccoli and kale also contain calcium. Juice, soymilk, and cereals often have added calcium.

Calcium Supplements

Calcium pills can be used to supplement the diet. If you eat enough calcium in your diet you don't need calcium pills. If

needed, calcium pills can be bought without a prescription. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about any possible interactions between calcium pills and your other medications.

Calcium carbonate and calcium citrate are the best forms to buy. Look for labels that say, “purified” or have the USP symbol. The label will also tell you how many doses or pills to take. Many types are available:

Calcium carbonate supplements

- Viactiv Soft Calcium Chews with Vitamins D & K
- Tums 500
- Caltrate 600
- GNC Calcium Complete (400 mg)
- Os-Cal 500

Calcium citrate supplements

- Citracal
- TwinLab Calcium Citrate Caps (300 mg)
- GNC Calcimate Plus 800 (Calcium Citrate Malate)
- Solgar Calcium Citrate (250 mg)
- Citrical Ultradense Calcium Citrate (200 mg)

When to Have Calcium

Take calcium-rich foods or pills spaced throughout the day. If you find that the Calcium causes gas or constipation, try increasing fluids or try another type of calcium.