

Creating Health & Nutrition Fact Sheets



Why Is Calcium Important?

Calcium is a mineral needed for strong bones and teeth. Our bodies build bones until around age 30. After this age, bones continue to store calcium but do not grow. To keep bones strong, we need to eat and drink calcium-rich foods daily to replace calcium used in our bodies. Calcium is also needed for other important body functions. It helps blood to clot and is needed to release insulin that maintains blood sugar levels. Calcium also is necessary

Calcium-Rich Eating

for vitamin B12 to be absorbed.

Osteoporosis occurs when the calcium in bones is not replaced, making bones brittle. Vitamin D is also needed for calcium to be absorbed. If you

have been diagnosed with osteoporosis or osteopenia (stage before osteoporosis), you should get 1,500 milligrams (mg) of calcium each day. This may be difficult to do without taking calcium supplements.

Tip

Eat or drink three to four good calcium sources each day. Calcium keeps bones strong and is linked to weight maintenance, lower blood pressure, and lower risk of some cancers.

Recommendations for Calcium and Vitamin D

Vitamin D RDAs		Calcium RDAs	
Ages 1–70 years	600 IU (15 micrograms)	Ages 1–3 years	700 mg
70+ years old	800 IU (20 micrograms)	4–8 years old	1,000 mg
Pregnancy and lactation	600 IU	9–18 years old	1,300 mg
Upper limit	4,000 IU	19–50 years old	1,000 mg
		51–70 years old, males	1,000 mg
		51–70 years old, females	1,200 mg
		71+ years old	1,200 mg
		Pregnancy and lactation	
		14–18 years old	1,300 mg
		19–50 years old	1,000 mg
		Upper limit	2,500 mg

Tips Affecting Different Age Groups

Calcium-rich eating is important for all age groups. Young people between ages 9 and 18 need the most calcium to build strong bones while they are growing. Adults from 18 to 50 years old need to maintain their bone strength by getting enough calcium each day. Adults over 50 lose calcium at a faster rate.

Shopping Tips

- Buy beverages that contain calcium and vitamin D for mealtime drinks.
- Look for broccoli, fish with bones, and nuts to add a calcium boost.

Food Recommendations

Many foods contain calcium, but dairy foods top the list. They also contain vitamin D and other nutrients that are necessary for calcium to be absorbed. Choose low-fat dairy products to reduce the fat and calories. Put some of these foods in your meals each day.

Some foods have been fortified with calcium and are good choices for those who cannot eat or drink dairy products. These include soy and rice milk, orange juice, cereals, and even some bread products. You can also add dry milk powder to many foods to boost the calcium content.

Food	Serving size	Calcium (mg)
Whole milk	1 cup	300
Skim milk	1 cup	300
Low-fat yogurt with fruit	1 cup	380
Cheese, American	1 oz	174
Cheese, mozzarella	1 oz	207
Ice cream	½ cup	92
Broccoli, fresh	½ cup	88
Soy milk, calcium fortified	1 cup	300
Orange juice, calcium fortified	1 cup	300

Taco Salad

Serving size: About 2 cups; makes 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

- 8 ounces ground turkey or lean ground beef
- 2 medium tomatoes, chopped
- ½ cup thinly sliced green onions
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ¾ cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 (15 oz) can dark red kidney beans, drained
- 1 medium avocado, pitted, peeled, chopped
- 1 (8 oz) jar taco sauce
- 4 cups tortilla chips, crushed
- 8 cups iceberg lettuce, shredded

DIRECTIONS

In medium saucepan, cook turkey and garlic until browned. Drain off fat. Stir in kidney beans and taco sauce. Bring to boiling; simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. In a very large bowl, combine lettuce, tomatoes, green onions. Divide salad into six servings. Top each with ¼ of the meat mixture and cheese. Top with avocado and sour cream, if desired.

NUTRIENT INFORMATION

Per serving: 390 calories, 21 g protein, 39 g carbohydrate, 10 g fiber, 18 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 40 mg cholesterol, 362 mg sodium, 178 mg calcium, 3 mg iron, 838 IU vitamin A, 16 mg vitamin C.

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Sources: *Calcium Rich Eating, Lesson 7* by J. Lynne Brown, Penn State Extension.

Dairy Council of California, www.dairycouncilofca.org/MD_QAMain.aspx.

National Research Council. *Dietary Reference Intakes for Calcium and Vitamin D*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2011.

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