

Patient information

How to get more calcium in your diet

How much Calcium does my child need?

My child's requirement for calcium is _____ mg / day.

This will vary according to age and is not the same for everyone.

What is Calcium and what does it do?

Calcium is needed at all ages for strong bones and teeth. It also helps to make our blood clot normally and regulate our heartbeat.

What happens if I don't get enough calcium?

A lack of calcium can lead to a condition called 'rickets' in children. This is where the bones become soft and weak, they can become deformed, including bowed legs or curvature of the spine. Rickets can also cause bone pain and poor growth.

Even if rickets do not develop, lack of calcium at any stage of life increases the risk of osteoporosis where bones become brittle and can break more easily.

Which children may be at higher risk of calcium deficiency?

- Those on a cow's milk-free or lactose-free diet
- Those with coeliac disease and/or inflammatory bowel disease
- Those who eat a limited range of foods

Which foods are good sources of calcium?

Dairy foods such as milk, cheese, yogurt and fromage frais are generally high in calcium, but if you cannot eat these or do not like them, there are dairy alternatives and many other foods which also contain calcium.

What if my child can't eat dairy foods?

Don't worry! There are plenty of other foods that contain calcium and most alternative milks are fortified so that they have similar levels of calcium as cow's milk. Children under five should not have rice milk as a replacement for cow's milk, breast milk or infant formula.

Calcium in dairy products		
Quantity	Food	Calcium content (mg)
200ml	Milk (all types)	240
1 pot (120g)	Yoghurt	200
30g	Cheddar cheese (matchbox size)	220
2 tbsp.	Grated hard cheese	150
1	Cheese snack e.g. Baby Bel®, cheese string	130
1	Cheese spread triangle	120
1 pot (45g)	Fromage frais	60
1 pot	Fromage frais calcium enriched (Petit Filous®)	125
1 scoop	Ice cream	75
200ml	Malted milk drink (25g in 200ml milk)	440 - 710
200g (1/2 a tin)	Rice pudding	176
120ml / 1 pot	Custard	120
30g / 1 fun size bar	Milk chocolate	66

N.B. Spinach, dried fruit, nuts and beans are not a good source of calcium because they contain oxalates and/or phytates which reduce how much calcium your body can absorb. However, these foods can be eaten as part of a balanced diet as they contain other benefits such as fibre.

Non-dairy sources of calcium (<i>calcium fortified products</i>)		
Quantity	Food	Calcium content (mg)
200ml (1 glass)	Calcium enriched milk alternatives such as soya / oat / nut / coconut milk etc	240
125g pot	Calcium fortified yoghurt or dessert or custard	150
150ml	Calcium enriched orange juice	180
1 serving	Calcium fortified infant cereals	60 - 120
30g	Calcium fortified cereals	130 - 150
15g dry cereal	Calcium fortified instant hot cereal e.g. Ready Brek® porridge	200ml
1 slice (40g)	Calcium fortified bread	190
1 slice	Gluten free bread	35
1	Original rusk	60
1 scoop	Soya ice cream	6

Other non-dairy sources of calcium		
Quantity	Food	Calcium content (mg)
½ tin	Tinned sardines with bones	260
¼ tin	Tinned salmon with bones	25
3 - 6 pieces	Scampi in breadcrumbs	95
30g or 10 prawns	Shelled prawns	50
50g	Quorn® pieces (cooked)	15
50g	Soya mince	40
60g	Tofu / soya bean curd (set with calcium chloride or calcium sulphate, not nigari)	200
1	Veggie burger / bean burger	100
1 - 2 slices	White bread	50 - 100
1 - 2 slices	Wholemeal bread	27 - 54
1	Pitta bread	60
¼ tin (100g)	Baked beans	50
1 (medium)	Fresh orange	75
1-2 tbsp.	Spring greens e.g. broccoli, kale, cabbage	25 - 50
1-2 tbsp.	Frozen or cooked peas	25

1 tbsp.	Almond butter (choose smooth nut butters)	36
<p>N.B. When choosing calcium foods, remember that high sugar intake often leads to tooth decay. It is important to avoid frequent sugary drinks and snacks for your dental health. If you have something sugary, it is best to have it after a meal.</p> <p>Please do not give whole nuts to children under the age of 5.</p>		

How to introduce more calcium into my child's diet?

- Aim for 2 - 3 portions of dairy foods or dairy alternatives per day.
- Start the day with cereal or Ready Brek® made with milk or a milk alternative.
- Include green vegetables such as broccoli at mealtimes.
- Give desserts such as yogurt or custard (or fortified alternatives such as soya or coconut).
- Use tinned sardines or pilchards (with bones) instead of tuna in a sandwich or on toast.
- Offer calcium-fortified fruit juice (e.g. Tropicana® calcium orange juice). Offer fruit juice no more than once per day (to prevent tooth decay) and dilute well with water.

Calcium content of foods

Daily requirements: The amount of calcium you need varies at different stages life.

Calcium supplements

Infants	Under 1 year	525mg
Children	1 – 3 years	350mg
	4 – 6 years	450mg
	7 – 10 years	550mg
Adolescents	11 – 18 years girls	800mg
	11 – 18 years boys	1000mg
Adults	19 years and over	700mg
Breastfeeding		1250mg
Women	Post-menopausal	1200mg
Coeliac disease	Adults	1000mg

Calcium supplements are available free of charge to women and children who are eligible for Healthy Start vouchers. If you are concerned your child is not meeting their daily requirement please ask your Dietitian or GP for advice.

Age appropriate calcium supplements are available from chemists, pharmacies and supermarkets.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps regulate the amount of calcium and phosphate in the body.

These nutrients are needed to keep bones, teeth and muscles healthy.

Which foods contain vitamin D?

- Oily fish such as salmon, sardines, herring and mackerel
- Red meat and liver
- Egg yolks
- Fortified margarine / butter and breakfast cereals

You cannot get enough Vitamin D from food alone. Most of our vitamin D is made by the action of sunlight on skin. Children who cover up their skin in sunlight, use a high SPF cream or stay indoors a lot may need to get more Vitamin D from food or a supplement.

The Department of Health recommends that:

- Breastfed babies from birth to 1 year of age should be given a daily supplement containing 8.5 to 10 micrograms of vitamin D
- Formula-fed babies shouldn't be given a vitamin D supplement until they're having less than 500ml (of infant formula a day, as infant formula is fortified with vitamin D
- Children aged 1 to 4 years old should be given a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D
- Adults (including pregnant and breastfeeding women) and children over 5 years should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D during the autumn and winter.

Women and children who qualify for the Healthy Start scheme can get free supplements containing the recommended amount of vitamin D. You can buy vitamin D supplements or vitamin drops containing vitamin D (for under 5s) at most pharmacies and supermarkets.

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