

How to get your daily calcium & vitamin D

Calcium is a mineral found in many foods. Your body needs calcium to build and maintain strong healthy bones and to help your nerves and muscles work. It also helps your blood to clot.

Which foods and drinks are the best sources of calcium?

Milk and milk products such as cheese, yoghurt and custard are the best sources of calcium. They are also a good source of protein and other nutrients that are important for bone and general health.

How much calcium do you need each day?

Adults need 1,000 to 1,500 mg calcium per day.

Men 19 to 70 years	●●●●●●	(1,000 mg)
Men over 70 years	●●●●●●●●	(1,300 mg)
Women 19 to 50 years	●●●●●●	(1,000 mg)
Women over 50 years	●●●●●●●●	(1,300 mg)
Adults taking prednisone	●●●●●●●●●●	(1,500 mg)

(1 circle = 200 mg calcium)

You can get this by eating a varied diet and including two to three servings of milk and milk products each day. See the table over the page for how much calcium you get from milk, milk products and other types of food.



Which type of milk should you use?

The colour of the bottle top or carton tells you the type of milk. In general, lower fat milks have more calcium.

- **Dark blue top:** Whole milk. Use if you need to gain weight.
- **Light blue top:** Reduced-fat milk.
- **Green top:** Trim milk. Use reduced-fat milk or trim milk if you need to lose or maintain weight or lower your cholesterol.
- **Yellow or orange top:** Calcium-enriched milks. These are low in fat with a higher protein content and are enriched with extra calcium. Use if you need to lose or maintain weight and you have difficulty achieving your calcium requirements.

Tip: Make your own calcium-enriched milk by adding four tablespoons of skim milk powder to one litre of blue or green top milk. Use this milk as normal.



Other good sources of calcium

- Some green vegetables, for example, Chinese cabbage and choy sum.
- Whole canned fish with soft edible bones, such as sardines and salmon.
- Nuts, especially almonds and Brazil nuts.
- Tofu.
- Calcium enriched foods such as some breakfast cereals.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps your body to absorb calcium so is also required to maintain strong bones. The recommended vitamin D intake for adults ranges from 5 to 15 micrograms per day.

Food sources of vitamin D include eggs, oily fish (sardines, salmon, tuna), and vitamin D enriched foods such as some types of milk, yoghurt, and margarine.

It is very difficult to get enough vitamin D from food alone and the best source of vitamin D is sunshine directly on your skin (not through glass or with sunscreen on). Aim to spend about 20 minutes each day outside in the sunlight. In the summer, this should be before 11 a.m. and after 4 p.m. to avoid sunburn.

Calcium and vitamin D counter

Type of food	Serving size	Calcium	Vitamin D (micrograms)
Yellow or orange top calcium-enriched milk	1 cup (250 ml)	●●●	1.9
Light blue top milk	1 cup (250 ml)	●●	0.9
Green top milk	1 cup (250 ml)	●●	0.9
Edam cheese	2 slices (40 g)	●●	–
Sardines, canned with bones	¼ cup	●●	2.4
Dark blue top milk	1 cup (250 ml)	●●	1.2
Calcium-enriched soy milk	1 cup (250 ml)	●●	–
Calcium-enriched rice milk	1 cup (250 ml)	●●	–
Almond milk	1 cup (250 ml)	●	–
Coconut milk	1 cup (250 ml)	●	–
Yoghurt or dairy food	1 pottle (150g)	●	–
Tofu	3 cubes (3 cm)	●	–
Salmon, canned with bones	1 small can (95 g)	●	12.5
Mussels, boiled	1 cup	●	3.3



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Type of food	Serving size	Calcium	Vitamin D (micrograms)
Calcium-enriched breakfast cereal	1 bowl (45 g)	●	–
Ice cream	½ cup	●	–
Cottage cheese	½ cup	●	–
Chinese cabbage, boiled	1 cup	●	–
Baked beans	1 cup	●	–
Almonds	¼ cup	●	–
Dried figs	¼ cup	●	–
Sesame seeds	1 tablespoon	●	–
Skim milk powder	1 tablespoon	●	–
Vitamin D enriched margarine	2 teaspoons (10 g)	–	1
Egg, boiled	1 medium	–	0.9

(1 circle = 200 mg calcium)

– nil or negligible amount

Source: *Concise New Zealand Food Composition Tables*, New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research, 11th edition 2014.

What about calcium and vitamin D supplements?

If you can't get enough calcium from your diet (for example, you don't or can't have milk products), or you don't expose your skin to sunlight, you may need a calcium or vitamin D supplement. Discuss this with your GP.

Read the Ministry of Health's [information](#) and [position statement](#) on sun exposure and vitamin D.

Written by the Healthy Eating, Healthy Ageing Project, Older Person's Health Specialist Service, Canterbury District Health Board. Adapted by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Updated September 2016.