

Food Fact Sheet: Calcium

Calcium is important at all ages for strong bones and teeth. This Food Fact Sheet lists how much calcium different people need, what foods and drinks are good sources, and how you can add it to your diet.

Why do I need calcium?

Calcium is a mineral that is needed to maintain strong bones. It is also needed for healthy muscle and nerve function.

How much calcium do I need?

Table 1 - Daily guideline amounts

Group	Age (years)	Calcium (mg) per day
Infants	Under 1	525
Children	1-3	350
	4-6	450
	7-10	550
Adolescents	11-18	800 (girls)
		1000 (boys)
Adults	19+	700
Those who are breastfeeding		1250
Coeliac Disease	19+	1000-1500
Osteoporosis	19+	700 (up to 1000 on osteoporosis drug treatments)
Inflammatory Bowel disease (while taking corticosteroids)*	19+	800-1000

* *Discuss the need for a calcium supplement with your doctor or dietitian.*

You are more at risk of calcium deficiency if you:

- are on a cow's milk or lactose-free diet
- have [coeliac disease](#)
- have [osteoporosis](#)
- are [breastfeeding](#)
- are past the [menopause](#)

Limited evidence suggests that some older adults may benefit from higher intakes.



Where do I get calcium from?

Calcium in dairy products	Quantity	Calcium (mg)
Cow's milk, including Lactose free	100ml	120
Sheep's milk	100ml	170
Goat's milk	100ml	100-120

Cheese:	matchbox-size:	
Cheddar	30g	222
Edam/Halloumi	30g	238
Cottage	30g	38
Cheese triangle	1 triangle (15-17.5g)	84-138
Yoghurt (plain)	120g	181 (low fat) 193 (whole)
Fromage frais	1 pot (47-85g)	80-128
Rice pudding or custard pots	1 pot (55g)	60
Malted milk drink	25g serving in 200ml semi-skimmed milk	444-800
Rice pudding	½ large tin (200g)	198
Custard - tinned	1 serving (120ml)	110-127
Milk chocolate	30g	68
Non dairy sources of calcium		
<i>Calcium-fortified products</i>		
Calcium-fortified plant-based alternatives to milk e.g. soya, oat, nut, coconut, pea, rice* drinks	100 ml	120-189

Soya bean curd/tofu (only if set with calcium chloride (E509) or calcium sulphate (E516), not nigari)	100g (uncooked weight)	350-400
Calcium-fortified soya, coconut or oat yoghurt and soya dessert or custard	100g	120-211
Calcium-fortified coconut cheese	1 portion (30g)	45-221
Calcium-fortified infant cereals	1 serving (20g)	120
Calcium-fortified cereals	30g serving	136-174
Calcium-fortified instant hot oat cereal	1 tbsp dry cereal (15g)	200
Calcium-fortified bread	1 slice (37-50g)	84-179
Sardines (with bones) (in tomato sauce, olive oil, brine)	½ tin (60g)	273-407
Pilchards (with bones)	1 serving (60g)	150
Tinned salmon (with bones)	½ tin (106g)	115 (pink) 174 (red)
Whitebait	1 small portion (50g)	430
Scampi in breadcrumbs	6 pieces (90g)	90
White bread	2 large slices (100g)	155

Wholemeal bread	2 large slices (100g)	106
Pitta bread/chapatti	1 portion (65g)	90
Orange	1 medium (120g)	29
Broccoli, boiled	2 spears (85g)	36
Kale	100g boiled	150
Spring greens	1 serving (75g)	56

*Children under four and a half years old should not have rice drinks as a replacement for cow's milk, breast milk or infant formula.

Calcium absorption

Spinach, dried fruits, beans, seeds and nuts contain calcium but they also contain oxalates and/or phytates which reduce how much calcium your body can absorb from them. They have therefore not been listed and you should not rely on them as your main sources of calcium.

Can I get enough calcium in a vegan diet?

Yes! There are lots of plant-based foods and drinks that contain calcium listed in the table above.

Many plant-based alternatives to dairy products in the UK are fortified with calcium (they have extra calcium added to them). Calcium-set tofu and calcium-fortified bread are good options to include as your main sources of calcium.

It is important to check that the products you are buying contain added calcium as many organic products, for example, are not fortified. Without added calcium, these foods and drinks do not have a noticeable amount of calcium.

Note that most plant-based alternatives to dairy, like rice, oat or nut drinks, contain less protein and calories than cow's milk.

Meals and snack ideas

- Start the day with cereal (many are calcium-fortified) with milk (or a calcium-fortified milk plant-based alternative).
- Use tinned sardines or pilchards (with the bones) instead of tuna in a sandwich or on toast.
- Have a stir fry including calcium-set tofu, broccoli spears and chopped nuts.
- If your child will not drink milk, include milk and milk alternatives in meals and snacks instead.
- Add yoghurt (or a calcium-fortified plant-based alternative) to fruit as a pudding or use milk or a milk substitute (calcium-fortified) to make custard and milk puddings.
- Include foods containing dairy or a plant-based alternative e.g. lasagne, cheese on toast, pancakes, naan breads, scones.
- Try a glass of low-fat milk or a plant-based alternative as a snack or to help rehydrate after exercising.

Healthy lifestyle advice for healthy bones

- Be active - weight-bearing activities like walking, aerobics, cycling, running and tennis are best. Aim for at least 30 minutes of activity, five times a week.
- Smoking is associated with an increased risk of osteoporosis, low bone density and increased risk of hip fracture. Stopping smoking prevents further excess bone loss.

Vitamin D and calcium

Vitamin D helps the absorption of calcium from foods. [For more information about how to meet your requirements see our Vitamin D fact sheet.](#)

Calcium supplements

It is best to get enough calcium from food. If you are unable to meet your daily requirements from food alone, you can take supplements to top up your intake. If you are taking medicines, other supplement products, or if you think you need more than 500mg of extra calcium; it is advisable to discuss this with a pharmacist, doctor or dietitian.

Top tips

- Getting enough calcium is important for healthy bones and teeth & muscle and nerve function.
- You need Vitamin D to absorb the calcium in your diet.
- Don't forget, low-fat dairy products have the same amount of calcium as the full-fat versions.
- Remember to check plant-based alternatives to dairy have added calcium (often called 'fortified'). Most organic products are not calcium-fortified.
- Most people can get enough calcium from a varied and nutritious diet, but there are supplements available if this is difficult for you.