

Calcium

Calcium is important because it gives your bones the strength and hardness they need to cope with everyday activities.

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Calcium-rich foods

There are plenty of foods that are rich in calcium, including:

- dairy products, like milk, cheese and yoghurt
- leafy green vegetables, like broccoli, cabbage and watercress but **not** spinach
- fruit, like oranges, satsumas and dried figs
- carbohydrates, like white pitta bread, pasta and rice
- fish, like sardines and mackerel.

Spinach contains high levels of calcium. But the body can't digest it very well.

Low-fat dairy products contain just as much calcium as higher-fat options.

Many dairy-free and meat-free products such as calcium-set tofu and plant-based milks are fortified with calcium. This means calcium has been added to the food. Check the label to find out how much calcium has been added.

If you don't eat dairy products, make sure you enjoy plenty of non-dairy calcium-rich foods. Find examples in our [**calcium-rich food chooser**](#).

Use our calcium-rich food chooser to find more foods rich in calcium

How much calcium do I need?

Calcium is measured in milligrams (mg).

Most adults need **700mg** of calcium a day, including if you're pregnant.

If you're breast-feeding, you should increase your intake to 1,250mg.

There are some health conditions where your doctor may advise you to have less or more calcium. Talk to your doctor if you're unsure how much calcium you should have.

If you're at risk of osteoporosis or taking an osteoporosis medicine, your doctor may advise you to increase your intake to around 1,000mg of calcium a day. This is to make sure you're getting enough for your bones.

The amount of calcium children and teenagers need depends on their age.

- Up to one year: 525mg
- One to three years: 350mg
- Four to six years: 450mg
- Seven to ten years: 550mg
- Boys 11 to 18 years: 1,000mg
- Girls 11 to 18 years: 800mg

Do I need to take a calcium supplement?

You can usually get all the calcium you need for your bones from your food, without taking a supplement.

If you can't get enough calcium from your food, you can use supplements to top-up.

There are two main forms of calcium supplements – calcium carbonate and calcium citrate. Research has shown that both types of supplements are good for your bones.

Calcium supplements can cause constipation or diarrhoea. They can also cause you to feel sick. If you experience side effects, it may be helpful to talk to a healthcare professional about trying a different type of calcium supplement.

Taking more than the recommended amount of calcium is unlikely to improve your bone strength.

It's possible to have too many calcium supplements. Taking more than 1,500mg of calcium supplements a day can be bad for your health. It can cause stomach pain, diarrhoea and lead to kidney stones.

You may have read that calcium supplements increase the risk of heart attacks. But there's not enough evidence to prove that they increase your risk.

Make sure to check the packaging on your calcium supplement and any other supplements you're taking. This is because other supplements may also contain calcium. It's important to find out how much calcium all your supplements provide so you don't take too much. Most calcium supplements provide between 300mg and 1,000mg of calcium.

If you've been prescribed calcium, you may find the amount of calcium on the box is higher than you expect. Your body won't use all the calcium. The amount of calcium that your body should be able to use is called 'available' calcium. And this can be found in the leaflet that comes with your supplements. Always take the number of tablets recommended by your doctor as too many calcium supplements can be harmful.

Calcium supplements are sometimes prescribed with [vitamin D supplements](#).

You can stop taking your supplement if you're getting enough calcium from your food. But stopping your supplement when you're not getting enough can harm your bones. Let your doctor know if you stop taking your supplement.

How do I take my calcium supplement?

Your supplement will come with instructions on how to take it.

You may read in the instructions that not all the calcium in the supplement will be absorbed. The instructions may also say that certain foods may reduce the amount of calcium absorbed by the body. These foods are spinach, rhubarb and those high in fibre, like wholemeal bread, oats and beans.

It's true that these foods can affect calcium absorption. But it shouldn't make a difference to your bones. You'll still absorb enough calcium from your supplement. It's important to still have fibre as part of a balanced diet because it helps with digestion.

Am I getting enough calcium?

Calcium blood tests do **not** tell you if you are getting enough calcium from your diet or if you need a supplement.

By eating a healthy balanced diet you should be getting enough calcium. If you are not sure, you can look at our [**calcium food chooser**](#) or talk with a healthcare professional.

More support and information

About our health information

Our health information is written by the health information team and is reviewed by healthcare professionals and people living with osteoporosis. We make every reasonable effort to ensure the content is accurate and up-to-date.

Our information is not intended to replace the medical advice provided by your own doctor or other healthcare professional. Please always talk to a healthcare professional to discuss your bone health. ROS is not responsible for and has no liability for misinterpretation, misuse of information, loss or damage arising from any reliance on or use of the information provided.

For more information about osteoporosis visit [**theros.org.uk/info**](https://theros.org.uk/info) or call **01761 471771** to order printed information.

Support for you

The Bone Health and Osteoporosis UK online community is a welcoming and safe space for you to share your experiences with others. Whether you're living with osteoporosis or supporting someone, our community is here for you. Visit [**theros.org.uk/online-community**](https://theros.org.uk/online-community)

We have a network of support groups and teams across the UK, which are run by volunteers. Our groups provide support by organising regular meetings – both face-to-face and online. Regardless of where you live, you can join an online meeting from anywhere in the UK. Find your local support group and view the online programme at [**theros.org.uk/support-groups**](https://theros.org.uk/support-groups) or email [**volunteerengagement@theros.org.uk**](mailto:volunteerengagement@theros.org.uk) or call **01761 473113**

Our specialist Helpline nurses are here to answer your questions or concerns about bone health or living with osteoporosis. You can call, for free, on **0808 800 0035** or email [**nurses@theros.org.uk**](mailto:nurses@theros.org.uk)

Become a member of the ROS and gain access to guidance and support from bone health experts and all the latest information on osteoporosis. Join today at [**theros.org.uk/membership**](https://theros.org.uk/membership) or call **01761 473287**



Better bone health for everybody

About the Royal Osteoporosis Society

We're the Royal Osteoporosis Society – the UK's largest national charity dedicated to improving bone health and beating osteoporosis. And we're here for everyone. We equip people with practical information and support to take action on their bone health.

Working with healthcare professionals and policy-makers, we're influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level. We're driving the research and development of new treatments, to beat osteoporosis together.

How you can help

As an independent charity, we don't receive any government funding. So we can only continue to provide our services through the generosity of our supporters.

We would appreciate any donation you're able to give to support our work. If you'd like to donate, visit [**theros.org.uk/donate**](https://theros.org.uk/donate) or call **01761 473287**

Your donation will help us support more people with osteoporosis.

To find out about volunteering, visit [**theros.org.uk/volunteer**](https://theros.org.uk/volunteer) or call **01761 473113**

Last review: March 2025

Next review: March 2028