

First line advice: For Patients with a Low Calcium Intake

This information sheet has been provided to give you basic initial information about what to do if you have, or are at risk of, a low calcium intake. A healthy diet should include foods rich in calcium to develop and maintain strong bones and teeth.

Who is at risk?

People who have very little dairy food in their diet are at higher risk of not meeting their daily calcium requirements. In some circumstances requirements are higher than normal such as if breastfeeding or after the menopause. Additionally, in some conditions the body loses calcium from the gut for example fat malabsorption and coeliac disease. If you fall into one of these groups you may need further guidance to increase your calcium intake further.

Lack of calcium when young can result in stunted growth and/or not achieving peak bone mass. Peak bone mass is achieved in early adulthood and if not achieved people become at **increased risk of Osteoporosis**. In adulthood, making sure calcium intakes are adequate is vital to protect against bone loss in later life.

Sources of Calcium

Choosing **3 portions** of dairy foods or dairy alternatives each day should provide enough calcium for the average adult.

Below are some examples of 1 portion of calcium:

- 1 glass cow's milk (200ml)**
- 1 average pot or cup of yoghurt (natural or fruit) (125g)**
- 30g or 'matchbox size' of cheese**

Both semi-skimmed and skimmed milk have the same amount of calcium as full fat milk. Lactose (found in dairy foods) helps the body to absorb calcium in the gut; therefore dairy foods are good sources of calcium. Additionally, there are non-dairy sources.

- 1 glass soya / rice / oat milk with added calcium (200ml)**
- 1 pot (125g) of soya yoghurt with added calcium**
- ½ can of sardines (with bones)**
- 1 can of pilchards (with bones)**

In smaller amounts calcium is also found in:

- Dark green vegetables (Except spinach which prevents calcium absorption)
- Nuts (e.g. almonds, brazil nuts and hazelnuts)
- Tahini, sesame seeds
- Tap water in hard water areas
- Pulses (e.g. baked beans, dried lentils)
- Dried fruit (e.g. raisins, apricots figs)
- Fortified bread and cereals

Vitamin D is essential for absorption of calcium. The best sources is from sun exposure on skin, but sources can also be found in oily fish, (mackerel, salmon, sardines) and fortified foods (e.g. cereals, bread, milk, margarine).

This information sheet was produced by the Community Dietitians and is intended to be given by a health professional only. It is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis or dietary advice given by a Registered Dietitian. The advice is not appropriate for certain medical conditions such as diets that require the exclusion or restriction of particular foods. If in doubt, please check with your medical practitioner.

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