

# CALCIUM ESSENTIALS:

## GOOD FOR YOUR BONES AND BEYOND!



### CALCIUM IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUR BONES – AND SO MUCH MORE!

You’ve probably been hearing about the calcium and bone connection for as long as you can remember. Well, there is a good reason for that – calcium is the most abundant mineral in the body, and **99% of it is stored in your bones.**

Calcium is for everyone – not just for kids or older adults!

### GETTING ENOUGH CALCIUM AT EACH STAGE OF LIFE CAN HELP KEEP BONES HEALTHY BY:

#### CHILDREN

**SUPPORTING HEALTHY BONE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT** during childhood.

#### TEENS - 30 YEARS

**BUILDING BONE MASS** during teen years. This time of life is important as bones are still growing. Peak bone mass is typically reached for most people by age 30.

#### ADULTS

**CONTRIBUTING TO BONE DENSITY** in adulthood.

#### OLDER ADULTS

**HELPING PREVENT OSTEOPOROSIS,** a disease that weakens bones and makes them more likely to break, mainly in older adults.

### CALCIUM ALSO HAS MANY OTHER IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS



TEETH



BLOOD FLOW



BLOOD PRESSURE



MUSCLES (including your heart)



NERVOUS SYSTEM



HORMONES



COLORECTAL CANCER

It may also play a role in reducing your risk of

# MOST CANADIANS ARE **Not** GETTING ENOUGH CALCIUM – IT'S A REAL PROBLEM!

ON AVERAGE,

# 68%

## OF CANADIANS ARE NOT GETTING ENOUGH CALCIUM FROM THEIR DIET



Because your body cannot produce calcium on its own, you need to get it from your diet.

### This includes:

CHILDREN (AGED 1 TO 8)

42%

TEENAGE GIRLS (AGED 14 TO 18)

86%

WOMEN (AGED 19 TO 50)

~75%

OLDER MALE ADULTS (71 YEARS AND OLDER)

91%

OLDER FEMALE ADULTS (71 YEARS AND OLDER)

97%

Other groups are also struggling to get enough calcium, making these low intakes of calcium a significant public health concern.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CALCIUM AND OSTEOPOROSIS

Peak bone mass — when bones are at their strongest — is typically reached during young adulthood. But as a living tissue, your bones continue to change throughout your life, growing, renewing and repairing as needed.

When you don't get enough calcium in your diet to maintain essential functions, your body takes what it needs out of your bones. Over time, this can cause your bones to become fragile, leading to osteoporotic fractures. Osteoporosis is a disease characterized by low bone mass and deterioration of bone tissue. According to Osteoporosis Canada, **at least 1 in 3 women, and 1 in 5 men**, will break a bone due to osteoporosis in their lifetime.

By the time bones become weak and start to break, osteoporosis may already be advanced and harder to manage. When it comes to bone health, adopting healthy lifestyle habits early on can make a difference.

- Consume a diet rich in calcium that includes other bone-building nutrients every day throughout life.
- Be physically active and include balance and strength exercises in your weekly routine.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Be smoke-free.

Osteoporosis is often referred to as the “silent thief”. Since it develops slowly over many years without any obvious symptoms, you may not even realize it's happening.



# HOW MUCH CALCIUM DO YOU NEED DAILY?

## CALCIUM RECOMMENDATIONS\*

AGE	GENDER	RECOMMENDED AMOUNT (mg)
1-3		<b>700</b>
4-8		<b>1,000</b>
9-18		<b>1,300<sup>†</sup></b>
19-50		<b>1,000<sup>†</sup></b>
51-70		<b>1,200</b>
51-70		<b>1,000</b>
71+		<b>1,200</b>

\* These recommendations are from Health Canada and Osteoporosis Canada.  
 † The same recommendations apply to women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

## WHERE CAN YOU FIND CALCIUM?

Milk products – like milk, cheese and yogurt – are among the best natural sources of calcium. You can also find good amounts in canned fish with bones (remember: the bones are important for calcium), and smaller amounts in legumes, vegetables, nuts and seeds. Calcium-fortified foods and calcium-set tofu can also contribute to your calcium intake.

**When it comes to bone health, let nutritious food be your foundation, as the nutrients in food work together to support healthy bones.**

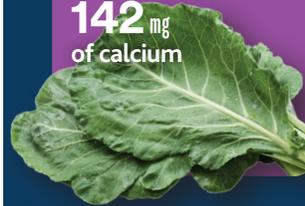
## STRONG BONES NEED MORE THAN CALCIUM — OTHER NUTRIENTS MATTER TOO!

While calcium plays a key part in preventing osteoporosis and keeping your bones strong, it doesn't work alone! Osteoporosis Canada recommends adequate intakes of vitamins D and K, protein and magnesium. There are other important bone-health allies, including vitamin A and phosphorus. These nutrients, along with other compounds found in whole foods, interact and work together to support your overall health.

### COLLARDS

125 mL

**142 mg**  
of calcium



### CHEDDAR CHEESE

30 g

**202 mg**  
of calcium



### MILK (2% M.F.)

250 mL

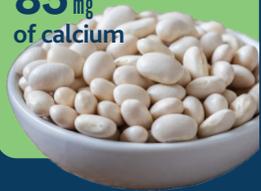
**309 mg**  
of calcium



### WHITE BEANS

125 mL

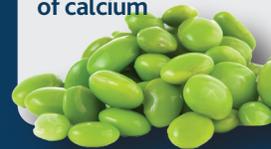
**85 mg**  
of calcium



### EDAMAME

125 mL

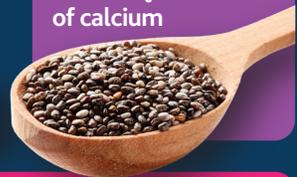
**138 mg**  
of calcium



### CHIA SEEDS

30 g (45 mL)

**189 mg**  
of calcium



**99%**

OF THE BODY'S CALCIUM IS  
STORED IN YOUR BONES.

### SARDINES

CANNED WITH BONES

100 g

**382 mg**  
of calcium



### PLAIN YOGURT

115 g

**131-175 mg**  
of calcium



### ALMONDS

30 g (60 mL)

**81 mg**  
of calcium





**MILK** (2% M.F.)  
250 mL  
**309 mg**  
of calcium



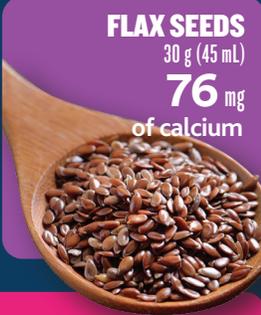
**BOK CHOY**  
125 mL  
**84 mg**  
of calcium



**MOZZARELLA CHEESE**  
30 g  
**172 mg**  
of calcium



**GREEK YOGURT, PLAIN**  
115 g  
**115-148 mg**  
of calcium



**FLAX SEEDS**  
30 g (45 mL)  
**76 mg**  
of calcium



**99%**  
OF THE BODY'S CALCIUM IS  
STORED IN YOUR BONES.



**COTTAGE CHEESE**  
125 g  
**139 mg**  
of calcium



**NAVY BEANS**  
125 mL  
**66 mg**  
of calcium



This handout comes with a companion insert that lists commonly consumed foods and indicates whether they are considered a source of calcium according to Health Canada's criteria (providing at least 65 mg of calcium per serving).

**CALCIUM CONTENT OF COMMON FOODS**

According to Health Canada, a food must provide at least 65 mg of calcium per serving to be considered a source of calcium.

This table shows how much calcium each food contains, but the amount your body absorbs can vary. For example, calcium from milk products, broccoli, bok choy and kale is well absorbed. However, the naturally occurring calcium in many other plant-based foods is less well absorbed due to naturally present compounds in these foods that limit calcium absorption. This is particularly true for sesame seeds, spinach and flax seeds, which provide valuable nutrients, but are not reliable sources of calcium. For calcium-fortified foods, the type of calcium added can also affect how well your body absorbs it.

FOOD	SERVING SIZE	CALCIUM CONTENT (mg)	SOURCE OF CALCIUM (mg)
<b>MILK PRODUCTS</b>			
Milk (2% milk fat)	250 mL	309	Yes
Cheddar cheese	30 g	202	Yes
Cottage cheese	125 g	139	Yes
Mozzarella cheese	30 g	172	Yes
Swiss cheese	30 g	237	Yes
Yogurt, plain	175 g	153/175	Yes
Yogurt, vanilla or fruit flavoured	175 g	125-144	Yes
Creek yogurt, plain	175 g	175	Yes
Creek yogurt, vanilla or fruit flavoured	175 g	99-148	Yes
<b>VEGETABLES</b>			
Bok choy, boiled, drained, sliced	125 mL	84	Yes
Broccoli, boiled, drained, chopped	125 mL	142	Yes
Cauliflower, boiled, drained, chopped	125 mL	33	No
Brussels sprouts, boiled, drained, chopped	125 mL	49	No
Kale, boiled, drained, chopped	140 g	38	No
Sweet potato, boiled, without skin, mashed	1 medium	52	No
<b>FRUITS</b>			
Orange, raw	1 medium	84	Yes
<b>NUTS AND SEEDS</b>			
Almonds, unroasted or dry roasted, unblanched	30 g (60 mL)	81	Yes
Cashew nuts	30 g (45 mL)	76	Yes
Flax seeds	30 g (45 mL)	18	No
Sesame seeds, dried, shelled	30 g (45 mL)	18	No
<b>LEGUMES</b>			
Edamame, boiled	125 mL	138	Yes
Navy beans, boiled	125 mL	66	Yes
White beans, boiled	125 mL	85	Yes
White beans, canned	30 g (60 mL)	11	No
Hummus, commercial	100 g	42	No
Pinto beans, canned	125 mL	26	No
Red kidney beans, canned	125 mL	26	No
<b>FISH</b>			
Salmon, sockeye (red), canned with bones, drained	100 g	239	Yes
Sardines, canned with bones, drained	100 g	382	Yes
<b>FORTIFIED FOODS</b>			
Fortified plant-based beverages (soy, almond, oat, cashew, etc.) <sup>a</sup>	250 mL	313	Yes
Tofu, firm or extra-firm, prepared with calcium sulfate <sup>b</sup>	85 g	75-225	Yes

a. Serving sizes for health food are based on the reference amounts from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Nutrition Labeling Regulations.  
b. Calcium content of products with calcium fortification are based on 2022 Canadian nutrition label size for natural (plain) 2% - 3.9% milk fat and Greek yogurt (2% milk fat) and cottage cheese (2% milk fat).  
c. Calcium content of products with calcium fortification are based on 2022 Canadian nutrition label size for natural (plain) 2% - 3.9% milk fat and Greek yogurt (2% milk fat) and cottage cheese (2% milk fat).  
d. Some plant-based beverages are fortified with calcium. Check the label for the amount of calcium. Not all plant-based beverages are fortified with calcium. Some plant-based beverages are fortified with calcium. Check the label for the amount of calcium. Also, the amount of calcium added to beverages may vary by brand and type. Potential values are based on 2022 Canadian nutrition label size for 100% fruit juice. Check the label for more information.  
e. Calcium content of calcium sulfate is based on 2022 Canadian nutrition label size for 100% fruit juice. Check the label for more information.



For recipes and strategies to support your health journey — and to access the scientific references related to this handout — visit:

**WhatYouEat.ca**

The content in this handout has been reviewed by Osteoporosis Canada.  
osteoporosis.ca



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# CALCIUM CONTENT OF COMMON FOODS

FOOD	SERVING SIZE <sup>a</sup>	CALCIUM CONTENT (mg) <sup>b</sup>	SOURCE OF CALCIUM (≥65 mg/SERVING)
<b>MILK PRODUCTS</b>			
Milk (2% milk fat)	250 mL	309	Yes
Cheddar cheese	30 g	202	Yes
Cottage cheese	125 g	139	Yes
Mozzarella cheese	30 g	172	Yes
Swiss cheese	30 g	237	Yes
Yogurt, plain <sup>c</sup>	115 g	131-175	Yes
Yogurt, vanilla or fruit flavoured <sup>c</sup>	115 g	125-144	Yes
Greek yogurt, plain <sup>c</sup>	115 g	115-148	Yes
Greek yogurt, vanilla or fruit flavoured <sup>c</sup>	115 g	99-148	Yes
<b>VEGETABLES</b>			
Bok choy, boiled, drained, shredded	125 mL	84	Yes
Collards, boiled, drained, chopped	125 mL	142	Yes
Broccoli, boiled, drained, chopped	125 mL	33	No
Kale, boiled, drained, chopped	125 mL	49	No
Sweet potato, boiled, without skin, mashed	140 g	38	No
<b>FRUITS</b>			
Orange, raw	1 medium	52	No
<b>NUTS AND SEEDS</b>			
Almonds, unroasted or dry-roasted, unblanched	30 g (60 mL)	81	Yes
Chia seeds	30 g (45 mL)	189	Yes
Flax seeds	30 g (45 mL)	76	Yes
Sesame seeds, dried, shelled	30 g (60 mL)	18	No
<b>LEGUMES</b>			
Edamame, boiled	125 mL	138	Yes
Navy beans, boiled	125 mL	66	Yes
White beans, boiled	125 mL	85	Yes
Hummus, commercial	30 g (30 mL)	11	No
Pinto beans, boiled	125 mL	42	No
Red kidney beans, boiled	125 mL	26	No
<b>FISH</b>			
Salmon, sockeye (red), canned with bones, drained	100 g	239	Yes
Sardines, canned with bones, drained	100 g	382	Yes
<b>FORTIFIED FOODS</b>			
Fortified plant-based beverages (soy, almond, oat, cashew, etc.) <sup>d</sup>	250 mL	313	Yes
Tofu, firm or extra-firm, prepared with calcium sulfate <sup>e</sup>	85 g	75-225	Yes

According to Health Canada, a food must provide at least 65 mg of calcium per serving to be considered a source of calcium.

This table shows how much calcium each food contains, but the amount your body absorbs can vary. For example, calcium from milk products, broccoli, bok choy and kale is well absorbed. However, the naturally occurring calcium in many other plant-based foods is less well absorbed due to naturally present compounds in these foods that limit calcium absorption. This is particularly true for sesame seeds, spinach and rhubarb which provide valuable nutrients, but are not reliable sources of calcium. For calcium-fortified foods, the type of calcium added can also affect how well your body absorbs it.

- Serving sizes for each food are based on the reference amounts from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's nutrition labelling requirements.
- Data on calcium content were sourced from Health Canada's Canadian Nutrient File, unless indicated otherwise.
- Calcium content of yogurt varies; presented ranges are based on a 2025 Canadian marketplace scan for regular yogurts (2 - 3.9% milk fat) and Greek yogurts (2% milk fat). Check the label for more information.
- Some plant-based beverages are fortified with calcium – check the label. As per Health Canada regulations, when plant-based beverages are fortified, they must contain 125 mg of calcium per 100 mL; the table above reflects this. Keep in mind that added calcium may settle at the bottom of the container – and remain there, even after vigorous shaking – so these beverages may not be a reliable source of calcium. Also, the form of calcium used in fortification may not be as well absorbed as the naturally occurring calcium in cow's milk.
- Calcium content of calcium-set tofu varies considerably by brand and type; presented values are based on a 2022 Canadian marketplace scan for firm/extra firm tofu. Check the label for more information.

# THE 3-STEP GUIDE FOR BUILDING BETTER BONES

It's never too late, no matter your age, to take steps to add more calcium and other bone-building nutrients to your diet. Use this guide to improve your calcium intake.

## Step 1: Determine how much calcium you need in a day.

**How much calcium do you need daily?\***  
Check the box that applies to you.

Age	Recommended Amount (mg)
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-3	700
<input type="checkbox"/> 4-8	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 9-18	1,300†
<input type="checkbox"/> 19-50	1,000†
<input type="checkbox"/> 51-70	1,200 (female)
<input type="checkbox"/> 51-70	1,000 (male)
<input type="checkbox"/> 71+	1,200

\*These recommendations are from Health Canada and Osteoporosis Canada.

†The same recommendations apply to women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

## Step 2: Choose foods that will help you meet your calcium needs.

Using the *Calcium Content of Common Foods* table found on the other side of this document, circle the foods you enjoy that can be added to your calcium action plan to help meet your daily calcium needs.

To learn more about how calcium can be good for your bones and beyond, visit:

[WhatYouEat.ca](https://www.whatyoueat.ca)

## Step 3: Build your action plan.

Map out how you will add these foods to your calcium action plan. Include the foods, the amounts you eat and the amounts of calcium they contain in the table below. For example, if you circled milk and salmon in step 2, add them in the meals where they fit best in your action plan. After calculating your total calcium intake for the day, compare it to the daily requirement you indicated in step 1, and adjust if needed.

### My action plan to increase my calcium intake:

FOOD	AMOUNT	TOTAL QUANTITY OF CALCIUM (mg)
<b>BREAKFAST</b>		
<b>LUNCH</b>		
<b>DINNER</b>		
<b>SNACKS</b>		
<b>TOTAL CALCIUM INTAKE FOR THE DAY:</b>		

Take your bone health a step further and assess your intake of calcium, vitamin D, protein, magnesium, and vitamin K using Osteoporosis Canada's online *Nutrient Calculator* available at [Osteoporosis.ca](https://www.osteoporosis.ca).



The content in this handout has been reviewed by Osteoporosis Canada.

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