

DIET

Maintaining bone health

by Denise Nowack, RD

Good nutrition—particularly daily calcium—is important for everyone to maintain healthy bones. People with MS have a higher-than-average risk for bone loss for a host of reasons. We need 1,000–1,200 mg—and 1,500 for menopausal women—every day, and it can be hard to take in the recommended amounts. Hopefully these tips will help.

Use nonfat or low-fat dairy products often

- Use milk to reconstitute canned soups, cereals, or instant potatoes (300 mg/cup of milk).
- “Strengthen” your milk with nonfat dry milk powder. Add 2 tablespoons powdered milk to 1 cup regular milk for a 290 mg boost to the 300 mg already in it.
- Substitute yogurt for sour cream in dips, dressings, and toppings (240–400 mg/cup).
- Fill a baked potato with ½ cup of cottage cheese and broccoli (cheese/75 mg; broccoli/60 mg).
- Top casseroles, omelets, toast, or steamed vegetables with shredded low-fat Swiss or mozzarella cheese (150–250 mg/ounce).

Nondairy calcium sources

- Any type of fish with edible bones, such as canned salmon or sardines (440–569 mg).

- Dark green vegetables especially kale, broccoli, turnip greens, or mustard greens. The calcium in these veggies is better absorbed than the calcium in spinach, rhubarb, beet greens, or almonds.

A complication

Phytates (found in legumes like pinto beans and peas)

as well as oxalates (high in spinach, rhubarb, and almonds) can interfere with calcium absorption. These foods have excellent nutritional benefits, but avoid eating them at the same time as your calcium-rich foods.

Calcium supplements

While foods remain the best source of calcium, supplements and/or calcium-fortified foods are the insurance plan to complement natural sources. You'll find calcium-fortified tofu, soy milk, orange juice, breads, and cereals. Check the labels to see just how much has been added so you don't go overboard.

The two popular supplements are “calcium carbonate” and “calcium citrate.” Read the labels for the amount of “elemental” calcium.

- Calcium carbonate (in Os-Cal or Tums) tends to be the best value. It needs to be taken with food to help with absorption.
- Calcium citrate (in Citrical or Solgar) contains less elemental



The daily calcium chase made easier.

calcium but tends to be better tolerated. It is absorbed more easily and can be taken on an empty stomach.

- Unrefined oyster shells, bone meal, or non-USP dolomite should be avoided, as historically they have contained lead and other toxic metals.

The body can best handle about 500 mg of calcium at one time. So split doses of supplements throughout the day. Be sure to check with your doctor or pharmacist to determine whether your supplement will interact with any of your prescription medications.

Beyond calcium

Vitamin D also plays an important role in calcium absorption. Getting enough vitamin D during the summer is easy. It only takes 15–20 minutes of skin exposure to the sun each day. Vitamin D can also be found in many foods fortified with calcium. Be careful with supplementation as vitamin D is stored in the body and can be toxic in amounts higher than 2,000 IU/day.

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