

Calcium Intake for Optimal Bone Health

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Calcium is a mineral that helps build strong bones and teeth. It also plays an important role in muscle contraction, nervous system function and maintenance of a regular heart beat to name but a few. Adequate calcium intake throughout your life, along side vitamin D, is vital to ensure optimal bone density. Inadequate intake will lead to low bone density which increase incidence of bone fractures, stress fractures in athletes and in the long-term osteoporosis.

**Ask your Dietitian what your specific requirements are.*

Why you might not have enough?

- If you are on a calorie restricted diet trying to get down to weight, overall nutrient intake may be low therefore levels of calcium may not meet requirements.
- Simply not getting enough calcium rich foods in the Diet
- You may be a vegan or vegetarian
- May have a dairy intolerance and have not managed to supplement calcium intake with non-dairy sources
- You may have a high sweat rate and have increased calcium loss through sweat

Strategies for achieving optimal bone health

- Spread consumption of calcium rich food throughout the day, including snacks
- 3 servings of calcium rich foods should be eaten daily, and more for adolescents going through growth spurts and for those that are pregnant or breastfeeding. Example of a portion:
 - 1/3 pint of milk
 - 1 small pot of yogurt
 - 30 g cheese
 - 45g half fat cheese
 - 90g cottage cheese
 - 60g low fat soft cheese

- Vitamin D aids the absorption of calcium so is needed in conjunction with calcium. (see vitamin D sheet for sources)

- Include dairy free fortified alternatives if on a dairy free or vegan diet
 - Fortified soya, coconut milk
 - Soya beans
 - Tofu
 - Green leafy vegetables
 - nuts