Why is calcium intake important?

Calcium is a nutrient that helps to build strong and healthy bones and teeth. It is also involved in our nervous system, blood clotting and muscle function.

How much calcium do you need?

In the UK, the following daily calcium intakes are recommended¹:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of life*</th>
<th>Recommended daily intake (mg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–12 months</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 years</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–6 years</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–10 years</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–18 years</td>
<td>Males 1000  Females 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breastfeeding</td>
<td>1250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note that this information sheet is aimed at adults. Requirements for pregnancy, breastfeeding and childhood are outlined in our information about different life stages available at [www.vegansociety.com/nutrition](http://www.vegansociety.com/nutrition).

How can you make sure that you get enough calcium?

You can get enough calcium from a well-planned vegan diet. Calcium-rich foods include calcium-fortified plant milks and yoghurts, calcium-set tofu, soya and linseed bread fortified with extra calcium, and fortified ready oat cereal. Other useful vegan sources of calcium include watercress, kale and okra. Using the meal planning tips on page two will help you to obtain plenty of well-absorbed calcium and hit your target on a daily basis (see infographic)²–⁵
These are general guidelines about nutrition. If you have concerns about your diet, please talk to your doctor about seeing a dietitian.

Discussing the use of supplements with a health professional will help to ensure that they are suitable for you.

**Calcium**

- **Calcium-set firm tofu** 100g (¼ dinner plate) Calcium content 400mg
- **Fortified milk alternative** 200ml (highball glass) Calcium content 240mg
- **Fortified yogurt alternative** 150g (½ big pot) Calcium content 180mg
- **Soya and linseed bread with extra calcium** (2 slices) Calcium content 222mg
- **Fortified ready oat cereal** 30g (½ cup) Calcium content 402mg

**TIP:** Choose at least two portions daily of the foods above to help ensure that you get enough calcium. For example, you might achieve this goal by using at least two portions of fortified plant milk over the course of the day.

The foods below provide smaller but useful amounts of calcium.

- **Tahini** 15g (tablespoon) Calcium content 102mg
- **Cooked okra** 80g (½ medium) Calcium content 74mg
- **Watercress** 80g (cereal/dessert bowl) Calcium content 110mg
- **Canned haricot beans** 150g (½ can) Calcium content 167mg
- **Cooked kale** 80g (4 heaped tablespoons) Calcium content 120mg
- **Dried figs** 30g (2 dried figs) Calcium content 75mg
- **Almonds** 30g (handful) Calcium content 81mg
If you are not eating calcium-rich foods daily as part of a balanced diet, then a calcium supplement may be needed to top up your dietary intake. Speak to a health professional if you have concerns about your calcium intake. A calcium deficiency can impact your general health and, in more severe cases, there can be a risk of rickets in children or osteoporosis in later life.

**Shopping tips**

- The amount of calcium added to fortified products varies, so check the nutrition information on labels.
- You can use the ingredients list on a label to work out if calcium has been used to set tofu, e.g. ‘Firming Agent: Calcium Sulphate’.

**Calcium absorption**

Calcium absorption is reduced by components of our diets called oxalates and phytates. The table below provides some information about the variable absorbability of calcium in plant-based foods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absorbability</th>
<th>Plant-based food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fortified foods, calcium-set tofu, kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, pak choi, cauliflower, watercress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Almonds, sesame seeds, pinto beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Spinach, rhubarb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fortified foods and calcium-set tofu provide us with good amounts of well-absorbed calcium. However, we also need to make sure that we get enough vitamin D because this nutrient is involved in calcium absorption. Further information is available in our [vitamin D guidelines](#).

**Calcium tips to take away**

- Ensure that your daily diet includes foods containing good amounts of well-absorbed calcium, such as fortified milk and yoghurt alternatives, calcium-set tofu and soya and linseed bread fortified with extra calcium.
- Other useful plant-based sources of calcium include kale, watercress, tahini, haricot beans, almonds, dried figs and okra.
- Follow our [vitamin D guidelines](#) to help optimise calcium absorption.

**Further information**

These are general guidelines about nutrition. If you have concerns about your diet, please talk to your doctor about seeing a dietitian. Discussing the use of supplements with a health professional will help to ensure that they are suitable for you.
These are general guidelines about nutrition. If you have concerns about your diet, please talk to your doctor about seeing a dietitian. Discussing the use of supplements with a health professional will help to ensure that they are suitable for you.

You might be interested to check out the following webpages at [www.vegansociety.com](http://www.vegansociety.com):

- **Vitamin D** – check that you are helping your body to absorb calcium.
- **Bone health**
- **Life stages**, including pregnancy, breastfeeding and different age groups
- **Nutrition overview**

**References**