

Getting Enough Calcium Without the Cow

For many people, milk and milk products, like yogurt and cheese, are important sources of calcium, vitamins, minerals and protein. However, what if you are one of the many Canadians who does not eat or drink dairy products?

Why do we need calcium?

Children and adults need calcium to help build and maintain strong bones and teeth. Our heart, nerves and muscles also need calcium to work well. People who do not eat dairy products (e.g., milk, yogurt, and cheese) must make sure they get enough calcium from other foods.

How do we get enough calcium everyday?

By following a healthy eating pattern, like the one in **Canada's Food Guide**, we can make sure that we get enough calcium and other nutrients. While many of the foods from the Milk and Alternatives food group are very high in calcium, it is important to choose calcium rich items from other food groups to make sure we get enough calcium daily. Find out how much calcium you need, and which foods have calcium.



Age	Amount of calcium needed
Children (2–3 years)	500 mg
Children (4–8 years)	800 mg
Youth (9–18 years)	1300 mg
Adults (19-50 years)	1000 mg
Adults (51+ years)	1200 mg
Adult Pregnant or Breastfeeding Women	1000 mg

Adapted from Dietary Reference Intakes, Copyright 2000 by the National Academy of Sciences

Which foods and beverages contain calcium?

Foods from the Milk and Alternatives food group are some of the richest sources of calcium. These foods include milk, canned milk, fortified soy beverage (soy beverage that has added calcium and other vitamins), yogurt, kefir and cheese. Other than dairy products, fortified soy beverage, calcium-fortified orange juice, tofu (set with calcium) and fish (with bones) are good sources of calcium. If you do not get enough calcium from food, you can take a daily calcium pill with vitamin D. Ask your doctor, a pharmacist or a dietitian to help you choose a supplement that is right for you.

Food or Beverage	Amount of Calcium
Cheddar cheese (50g, 1½ oz.)	360 mg
Calcium fortified orange juice (1 cup, 250 mL, 8 oz.)	370 mg
Cow's milk (chocolate, lactose free or buttermilk) or goat's milk (1 cup, 250 mL, 8 oz.)	300-345 mg
Firm tofu, set with calcium (¾ cup, 175 mL, 6 oz.)	347 mg
Fortified soy or rice beverage (1 cup, 250 mL, 8 oz.)	319 mg
Sardines, Atlantic with bones (6 fish, 75g, 2½ oz.)	276 mg
Fruit yogurt, non-fat (¾ cup, 175 mL, 6 oz.)	266 mg
Canned salmon, with bones (½ cup, 75g, 2½ oz.)	187 mg
Spinach, boiled (½ cup, 125 mL, 4 oz.)	129 mg
Toasted almonds (¼ cup, 60 mL, 2 oz.)	99 mg
Bok choy, swiss chard, kale, okra cooked (½ cup, 125 mL, 4 oz.)	50-85 mg
Cooked beans (e.g., navy, kidney, chickpeas) (¾ cup, 175 mL, 6oz.)	40-90 mg
Edamame (½ cup, 125 mL, 4 oz.)	52 mg
Broccoli, cooked (½ cup, 125mL, 4 oz.)	33 mg
Dried figs (2 figs, 17g)	27 mg
Tahini (2 Tbsp, 30 mL, 1 oz.)	20 mg

Canadian Nutrient File 2007b, Health Canada

What about Vitamin D?

Vitamin D helps us to absorb and use calcium. Our bodies make Vitamin D when sunlight shines on our skin. For a large part of the year in Canada, the sun is so low in the sky that its rays are not strong enough for us to make enough Vitamin D. Therefore, we must get Vitamin D from our food. Vitamin D is found in fish such as salmon and trout, liver and egg yolks. It is also added to all milk and margarine sold in Canada. Vitamin D is added to fortified soy and rice beverages, as well as some brands of orange juice, goat's milk and yogurt. Check the ingredient list and Nutrition Facts table to see if Vitamin D has been added. **Canada's Food Guide** recommends drinking two cups (500 mL) of milk or fortified soy beverage every day to get enough Vitamin D. People over the age of 50 need to take a daily Vitamin D supplement of 10 micrograms (400IU), in addition to drinking two cups of milk or fortified soy beverage every day.

Should I give soy or other alternative beverages to my child under two years old?

Do not give goat's milk, soy, rice, nut and potato beverages to children under two years old. These

beverages do not have the same amount of protein and fat as milk. Children under the age of two years need enough fat to grow well. If your child is under two years of age and cannot drink full fat (homogenized, 3.25% M.F.) cow's milk, continue to give breast milk and/or the formula that you are already using. After the age of two years, children can have full-fat fortified soy beverage instead of cow's milk.

What is the difference between milk allergy and lactose intolerance?

Milk allergy is rare and is a reaction that involves the immune system. It can cause upset stomach, vomiting or skin rash. See your doctor if you think you or your child might have a milk allergy.

Lactose intolerance is common. It means the body cannot digest lactose, the sugar in cow's milk. Lactose intolerance can cause gas, cramps, diarrhea, bloating and nausea. Some people with lactose intolerance can take a small amount of milk products without any problem. Yogurt and hard cheeses (like cheddar) have less lactose. Lactose-free milk (e.g., Lactaid™) is also a good choice. Ask a pharmacist about products that can help you to digest lactose.