

Healthy Living

Counting On Calcium When Dairy Won't Do

by Miriam Nelson, Ph.D.

(NAPSA)—Make no bones about it, everyone needs calcium for strong bones and teeth, weight management and general good health.



Dr. Nelson

Recent research suggests the appropriate amount of calcium varies with age and sex. Here are recommended daily amounts for:

- Girls ages 11-24: 1,200-1,500 mg
- Pregnant or nursing teens: 1,600-1,900 mg
- Women ages 25-50: 1,000 mg
- Pregnant or nursing women: 1,200-1,500 mg
- Postmenopausal women on estrogen replacement therapy: 1,000 mg
- Postmenopausal women not on estrogen replacement therapy: 1,500 mg
- Women over age 65: 1,500 mg
- Men over age 25: 1,000 mg

Unfortunately, for some people, many of the best sources of calcium—milk, cheese and other dairy products—are “forbidden” foods. Those who suffer from lactose intolerance often omit dairy products all together as the only way to avoid gas, bloating and discomfort.

I often suggest to people who can't eat dairy products that they make it a daily habit to take calcium supplements. Doses should be taken two to three times a day, depending on your calcium needs, in units of 500 mg or less, as that is all the calcium the body can absorb at one time.

Here are a few of the most frequent calcium-related questions I am asked.

Q. I have heard it's best to get calcium through natural foods such as milk and yogurt, but dairy products really upset my stomach. How can I be sure I am getting enough calcium through the other foods I eat?

A. People who lack the lactose enzyme to digest dairy products may have a hard time getting the appropriate amount of calcium through their daily food intake. While lots of foods fortified with calcium are available, most people still don't reach their recommended daily intake through fortified foods alone, especially if they're unable to eat dairy products.

Non-dairy calcium sources include sardines, salmon, oysters, scallops, broccoli, okra and kale. A calcium supplement is another resource to help meet your daily calcium requirement.

Q. I know there are different kinds of calcium supplements, what's the difference?

A. The majority of calcium supplements are made from calcium carbonate or calcium citrate. Calcium carbonate is most effective when taken with food, and seems to have a greater tendency to cause gas and bloating. Calcium citrate supplements such as Citracal® can be taken any time, with or without food, and usually do not cause gas or bloating. Calcium citrate may also be a better choice for people with lower stomach acid and those who take antacids, H2 Blockers, or Proton Pump Inhibitors, as calcium citrate supplements have high absorption that does not require stomach acid.

Q. I am under 30 years old, should I be worried about my bones yet?

A. Everybody needs calcium every day. Calcium helps muscles and nerves function. Adults consuming under 600 mg of calcium daily increase their risk of developing osteoporosis, a disease that leads to bone fractures. Combining the appropriate calcium intake throughout adulthood with regular exercise will help build strong bones and can help prevent osteoporosis.

Be proactive about maintaining good bone health, your bones depend on it.

• Dr. Nelson is the author of the “Strong Women” book series. Citracal® is a product of the Mission Pharmacal Company.