Q. Why is getting enough calcium important?

A. Remember the old milk commercial slogan. "Milk...it does a body good." You'd see a young kid drinking milk, growing up and getting stronger.

No, you don't have to drink milk. But it's high in calcium, and you do need to get enough calcium to protect your health.[1]

- **How much calcium do you need?** About 750 to 1,000 mg per day for adults.

Your body needs calcium to:
- Improve bone health
- Keep your teeth strong
- Support your heart and lungs

There's two ways to get more calcium...from food and the sun.

1. Calcium-rich food sources
Some of the best food sources for calcium include:
- Leafy greens (collard greens, kale, broccoli, bok choy)
- Foods fortified with calcium (juice, cereal, bread, orange juice)
- Nuts and seeds (almonds, peanuts, pistachios)
- Low-fat dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt)

Tip: Read food labels or consult a nutrition guide to track how much calcium you're getting from the foods you eat.

Get calcium from food & sun

ASK THE Wellness DOCTOR

2. Sun exposure to boost calcium
Even if you eat plenty of calcium-rich foods, your body might not absorb it. You need the right amount of vitamin D for this.[2] Sun exposure can help.

Exposing your face, arms, legs, or back without sunscreen for a few minutes a day can help your body make enough vitamin D to put the calcium in your diet to work.

- **Aim for 15 minutes a day.** About 15 minutes a day in the sun between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. most days of the week is effective in much of the United States.

Tip: When the weather is good, spend some time outdoors. Or talk to your doctor about taking a vitamin D supplement (1,000 to 2,000 IU per day)

If you're not getting enough calcium...your risk goes up for poor bone health and fractures.

Other ways to keep your bones healthy include...
- **Exercise.** Build stronger bones by lifting weights, hiking, jogging, or playing sports.

- **Healthy lifestyle habits.** Smoking, eating lots of salty foods, or drinking more than two alcoholic drinks a day if you're a man (or more than one drink a day if you're a woman) can rob your bones of calcium.

- **Water vs. other drinks.** Drinking too much coffee and carbonated beverages can also increase your risk for poor bone health.

If you make an effort to eat a balanced diet and spend a little time in the sun, you'll maximize the amount of calcium available in your body for good health.

References

1. National Osteoporosis Foundation. (2018). Calcium and vitamin D. From: https://tinyurl.com/238n8kk7
2. National Institutes of Health (2021). Vitamin D fact sheet for health professionals. From: https://tinyurl.com/ujkd2rdf