

Is Your Child Getting Enough Calcium?

Calcium is the building block on which children grow strong bones, teeth and muscles, yet nearly 85 percent of girls and 60 percent of boys between the ages of 9 and 18 do not get the recommended daily amount of this essential mineral.

The most effective way for children to consume calcium is through a calcium-rich diet. Children also need vitamin D to help absorb calcium more efficiently.

The recommended dose of vitamin D for children of all ages is 400 International Units (IUs) each day. Many foods, including low-fat milk, yogurt and fortified cereals, provide added vitamin D along with calcium.

Vitamin D is also made by the body from exposure to the sun. Only 15 minutes a day in the sun will provide children with one day's worth of vitamin D.

EATING A DIET RICH IN CALCIUM

Drinking milk and eating dairy products such as yogurt and cheese are excellent ways to ensure children get enough calcium in their diet. However, if your child is lactose intolerant or you choose to raise your child on a dairy-free diet, there are still ways for children to get enough calcium through other foods.

Dark green leafy vegetables, broccoli, white beans, almonds and calcium-enriched cereals, soy milk, rice milk and orange juice are all good choices for adding calcium to the diet.

Other sources of calcium for families not on a restricted diet include:

- Sardines
- Tofu
- Salmon
- Cottage cheese
- Spinach
- Kale
- Ice Cream
- Pudding

Children should avoid sodas, too much sugar, caffeine and excessive sodium in their diets because these things can interfere with the absorption of calcium in the body.

In most cases, children get enough calcium through a balanced, healthy diet. However, if your child is unable to eat dairy or is on a restricted diet, it may be necessary to add a calcium supplement to his diet.

Talk to a doctor before giving your child a calcium supplement because too much calcium in the diet through supplementation can cause health problems.

Watching your child's diet and including foods rich in calcium are the best ways to ensure he is getting what he needs to build strong bones and grow up healthy.

HOW MUCH CALCIUM DO CHILDREN NEED?

The amount of calcium children need on a daily basis is dependent upon their age. The Office of Dietary Supplements recommends the following amounts of calcium for children by age:

- 0-6 months – 210 milligrams
- 7-12 months – 270 milligrams
- 1-3 years – 500 milligrams
- 4-8 years – 800 milligrams
- 9-18 years – 1,300 milligrams

