



In college? Study labels for calcium

I just started my first year of college and I'm living away from home for the first time. My mom keeps telling me to watch my diet, especially my calcium intake. Why is she so worried about that?

It's not unusual for young adults in your situation to fall into poor eating habits. You'll be dealing with stress and an irregular routine, and you could lose easy access to nutrient-dense foods, including dairy foods.

Calcium is a special concern because getting enough as a young person has long-term implications. The body uses calcium in a lot of different ways, including helping muscles and blood vessels expand and contract, helping release hormones and enzymes, and helping send messages from the brain throughout the body through the nervous system. And, of course, you need it for strong bones and teeth.

If there's not enough calcium in the bloodstream, the body takes it from your bones in order to get everything done that needs to be done. If this happens too much, your bones will get weak over time, increasing your risk for osteoporosis and bone fractures.

It's especially important to get enough calcium during your formative years, because by your 20s, your bones will be the strongest they ever will be. And getting enough

vitamin D is important, too, because it helps your body absorb calcium.

You need the most calcium in your diet when you're 9 to 18 years old — 1,300 milligrams a day. That's the amount in more than four 8-ounce glasses of milk. Between the ages of 19 to 50 years old, you still need 1,000 milligrams a day. Milk contains about 300 milligrams of calcium per cup.

Of course, milk isn't the only food with calcium. Check Nutrition Facts labels. Calcium is listed as a percent and is based on 1,000 milligrams a day, so "10 percent" means a serving contains 100 milligrams of calcium.

Some other options:

- Plain fat-free yogurt, 1 cup, 450 milligrams.
- Orange juice with added calcium, 1 cup, 350 milligrams.
- Fruit yogurt, low-fat, 1 cup, 230 milligrams.
- American cheese, low-fat, 2 ounces, 310 milligrams.
- Raw broccoli, 1 medium stalk, 180 milligrams.
- Spinach, cooked from frozen, 1/2 cup, 140 milligrams.
- Frozen yogurt, soft-serve vanilla, 1/2 cup, 100 milligrams.
- Cooked broccoli, 1 cup, 95 milligrams.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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