

## Calcium

Calcium is a key building block for strong, healthy **bones**. But more than 85% of girls and 60% of boys ages 9 to 18 fail to get the recommended 1,300 milligrams of calcium per day.

That's not surprising when you consider that many kids now drink more soda than milk, which is one of the best sources of calcium. And teens that smoke or drink soda, caffeinated beverages, or alcohol may get even less calcium because those substances interfere with the way the body absorbs and uses calcium.

But at every age, from infancy to adolescence, calcium is one nutrient that kids simply can't afford to skip.

### What Calcium Does

During childhood and adolescence, the body uses the mineral calcium to build strong bones — a process that's all but complete by the end of the teen years. Bone calcium begins to decrease in young adulthood and progressive loss of bone occurs as we age, particularly in women.



Calcium plays an important role in muscle contraction, transmitting messages through the nerves, and the release of hormones. If blood calcium levels are low (due to poor calcium intake), calcium is taken from the bones to ensure normal cell function.

When kids get enough calcium and physical activity during childhood and the teen years, they can start out their adult lives with the strongest bones possible.

### Good Sources of Calcium



Of course, milk and other dairy products are good sources of calcium, and most contain added vitamin D, which is also important for bone health. Low fat milk is a “Go” food and is available with every school meal. Only low fat and non-fat milk are served with school meals. Encourage your child to select and drink milk with his or her meal.

### Kicking Up the Calcium

To make sure your children get enough calcium, try these creative tactics.

### Add cheese to meals and snacks:

- Use whole-grain soft-taco shells or tortillas to make burritos or wraps. Fill them with eggs and cheese for breakfast; turkey, cheese, lettuce, tomato, and light dressing for lunch; and beans, salsa, taco sauce, and cheese for dinner.
- Create mini-pizzas by topping whole-wheat English muffins or bagels with pizza sauce, low-fat mozzarella cheese, and toppings like mushrooms, green peppers, tomatoes, or chunks of grilled chicken.
- Serve whole-grain crackers with low-fat cheese as an afternoon treat.

### For dessert or an afternoon snack:

- Serve low-fat or fat-free frozen yogurt topped with fruit.
- Create parfaits with layers of plain yogurt, fruit, and whole-grain cereal.

### Serve nondairy foods that still pack a calcium punch:

- Add white beans to favorite soups.
- Top salads or cereals with slivered almonds and chickpeas.
- Serve chili with red beans and cheese.
- Pour a tall glass of calcium-fortified juice for breakfast.



Whether it is a warm summer day or for breakfast, smoothies are a great way to get kids to drink a cool drink packed with fruit and calcium.

### Smoothie Recipe

#### Ingredients

- 1/2 cup frozen blueberries (or other frozen fruit)
- 1/2 cup low-fat vanilla yogurt
- 1/2 cup skim or 1% milk
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2-3 ice cubes (optional)



#### Preparation

Combine all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth or to desired consistency then serve in glasses.

Adapted from The Children's Hospital article Calcium and Your Child  
<http://www.thechildrenshospital.org/wellness/info/parents/40418.aspx>