

The Nutrition Source

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The Bottom Line

Calcium is important. But milk isn't the only, or even best, source.

It's not a news flash that calcium is key for healthy bones. Getting enough calcium from childhood through adulthood helps build bones up and then helps slow the loss of bone as we age. It's not clear, though, that we need as much calcium as is generally recommended, and it's also not clear that dairy products are really the best source of calcium for most people.



While calcium and dairy can lower the risk of osteoporosis and colon cancer, high intake can increase the risk of prostate cancer and possibly ovarian cancer.

Plus, dairy products can be high in saturated fat as well as retinol (vitamin A), which at high levels can paradoxically weaken bones.

Good, non-dairy sources of calcium include collards, bok choy, fortified soy milk, baked beans, and supplements that contain both calcium and vitamin D (a better choice than taking calcium alone).

Read the full article on calcium and milk.

5 Quick Tips: Building Strong Bones

1. Look beyond the dairy aisle. Limit milk and dairy foods to no more than one to two servings per day. More won't necessarily do your bones any good—and less is fine, as long as you get enough calcium from other sources. Calcium-rich non-dairy foods include leafy green vegetables and broccoli, both of which are also great sources of vitamin K, another key nutrient for bone health. Beans and tofu can also supply calcium.

2. Get your vitamin D. Vitamin D plays a key role along with calcium in boosting bone health. Look for a multivitamin that supplies 1,000 IU of vitamin D per day. If your multi only has 400 IU of vitamin D, consider taking an extra supplement to get you up to 1,000 IU or 2,000 IU per day. Some people may need 3,000 or 4,000 IU per day for adequate blood levels, particularly if they have darker skin, spend winters in the northern U.S., or have little exposure to direct sunlight. If you fall into these groups, ask your physician to order a blood test for vitamin D. Read more about vitamin D in the vitamins section of The Nutrition Source.

3. Get active. Regular exercise, especially weight-bearing exercise such as walking or jogging, is an essential part of building and maintaining strong bones.

4. Be careful about getting too much retinol (vitamin A). Don't go overboard on fortified milk,