

# Keeping Your Bones Strong

---

## Follow Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating

- See Handout — Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. Choose the right number of servings from each food group of the Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. The right balance of foods is important to keep your bones strong.
- By following the Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating you will get the right amount of calcium. You will also get the other nutrients that are important for strong bones.

## Eat foods rich in calcium

- We need calcium all our adult life to keep our bones strong.
- Calcium is most plentiful in milk and foods made from milk such as yogourt and cheese. It is wise to drink milk or eat milk products daily.
- Calcium is also found in smaller amounts in other foods such as some vegetables, nuts, seeds and dried beans. The calcium is well absorbed from some vegetables such as cooked broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower and cabbage. In other vegetables such as spinach, calcium is poorly absorbed by the body.



## Ideas to get more calcium in your meals

### Have calcium-rich foods at every meal:

- milk, including butter- milk, canned milk and skim milk powder
- lactose-reduced milk (try this if regular milk bothers your stomach)
- soy drinks made with added calcium
- nutrition supplements (for example, Ensure, Boost, Resource or Sustacal)
- cheese, including hard cheese and cottage cheese
- cream soups made with milk
- milk puddings and custard.
- frozen yogourt, ice milk, ice cream and ice cream bars
- hot cocoa
- processed cheese spread
- broccoli, cabbage (especially Chinese cabbage such as bok choy), kale and rutabaga
- oranges and dried figs
- blackstrap molasses
- sesame seeds and almonds
- kidney beans or white beans (as in baked beans), and chick peas
- canned salmon and sardines (with the bones left in)
- tofu made with added calcium
- calcium-enriched foods (such as bread or juice with calcium added)

### More tips:

- Have milk as a beverage with meals.
- Add cheese and milk to soups, sauces and casseroles.
- Have a cheese sandwich for lunch.
- Have milk-based desserts such as frozen yogourt or pudding.
- Use milk in your coffee or tea instead of coffee whitener.
- For a snack have cheese and crackers, a small bowl of cereal with milk, sardines on calcium-enriched bread, or a cup of hot chocolate.
- Use yogourt as a dip, spread or dressing.
- Stir-fry broccoli, kale or bok choy with almonds as the protein
- Use canned salmon for sandwiches and casseroles.

## **Get your vitamin D**

Vitamin D helps your body use calcium. Vitamin D is made in your skin when you go out in the sun. It is also found in some foods and is added to milk.

### **Here's how you can get the vitamin D you need:**

1. Go for a walk outside or sit in a sunny porch or in the sunlight for at least 15 minutes every day. In the summer, a good time to be outside is in the morning or late afternoon when the sun is not too hot.
2. Vitamin D is found naturally in fatty fish and seafood, eggs and liver. Milk has vitamin D added to it, and so it is an excellent source of vitamin D. Two to three cups of milk a day will give you the vitamin D you need.

See Handout —  
Helpful Hints for  
Active Living.

### **Keep active**

- While you are getting your vitamin D from the sun, also exercise your bones by going for a walk. The best exercise to keep your bones strong is walking. Always keep safety in mind so that you don't fall.
- Other exercises that put weight on your bones such as lifting small weights also help your bones.

### **Other things to keep in mind**

**All of these things can weaken your bones**

- Smoking. Stop or try to cut back.
- Drinking too much alcohol.
- Drinking too much coffee or tea. Try to limit yourself to no more than 4 cups a day.
- Some pills — ask your pharmacist.

## **Pills and drugs to slow down or treat bone loss**

- Ask your doctor before taking any new pills or drugs. Even calcium pills can be harmful for some people. For example, they may be harmful if you have had kidney stones, or if you can't get out of bed and move around very much.
- Drugs given to slow down or treat bone loss work best when you exercise and eat foods rich in calcium and vitamin D.

### **Calcium pills**

If you don't eat enough calcium-rich foods, calcium pills may be needed. In some cases, your doctor may order calcium pills for you even though you are eating well.

### **Vitamin D pills**

If you do not get out in the sunlight and you don't drink 2-3 glasses of milk a day, then a vitamin D pill may be needed. Talk to your doctor.

### **Estrogen (for women)**

- Estrogen, a female hormone, helps keep a woman's bones healthy. After menopause or after having a hysterectomy, a woman's body makes less estrogen.
- Talk to your doctor about whether it would be wise for you to take estrogen or other hormones (for example, estrogen and progestin). Estrogen works the best to keep your bones strong if you start taking it in the first five years after menopause. However, it can still be helpful even if started later.
- Calcium and vitamin D pills are also often given along with estrogen.

### **Other Drugs**

- There are some new drugs that might help reduce bone loss or boost your bone strength. These include hormonal drugs for women or men (such as calcitonin), and non-hormonal drugs. Talk to your doctor.