

CALCIUM FROM PLANT FOODS

Can't tolerate or don't want to eat dairy? Many traditional societies have been dairy free, yet existing reports don't suggest higher rates of bone fractures.

Just ensure that you get enough plant sources of calcium on your plate.

how much do you need?

Daily calcium recommendations vary between countries and depend on your diet and lifestyle. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a minimum of 400–500 mg daily to prevent osteoporosis (Australia recommends 1000 mg). WHO also points out that high amounts of animal protein in Western diets might outweigh the positive effects of calcium intake on calcium balance.

Eight dairy-free tips to boost your calcium

Calcium is abundant in certain plant foods and it will add up during the day.

- ▶ **Dark-green vegetables.** Eat a cup of any low-oxalate vegetables daily and you'll absorb an astounding 40–50 per cent of their calcium! Think bok choy, kale, broccoli, watercress or Chinese cabbage (wombok).
- ▶ **Firm, calcium-set tofu.** Enjoy tofu in soups, stir-frys and desserts regularly during the week. For every half cup you score 300–500 mg of calcium!
- ▶ **Legumes.** Soak or sprout these before cooking, and enjoy

every day. One cup of cooked baked beans will supply about 100 mg of calcium.

- ▶ **Almonds/almond butter.** Use as a snack or spread. One quarter cup of almonds supplies 75 mg of calcium. Soak them for 8–12 hours first to boost their calcium bioavailability.
- ▶ **Tahini.** Spread it on bread, whip it into creamy salad dressings or use it in pasta sauce. Every two tablespoons will provide 130 mg of calcium, and more if it's made from unhulled seeds.
- ▶ **Linseeds or chia seeds.** Add one tablespoon to your cereal and gain another 36 mg of calcium.
- ▶ **Figs.** Five figs will deliver 190 mg of calcium—yum!

If you're still struggling to get enough calcium, look for fortified products, which are readily available in some countries, or take a supplement. But beware that excessive calcium may raise the risk of heart disease, prostate cancer and kidney stones.

Also avoid or limit salt, caffeine and alcohol, and don't smoke. Finally, get enough exercise and sun exposure for vitamin D.



Sue Radd is the award-winning author of *The Breakfast Book* and co-author of *Eat To Live*, internationally acclaimed for showing how savvy eating can combat cancer and heart disease and improve wellbeing. See www.sueradd.com for more nutrition information or follow her on Twitter @CulinaryMed.