5 Calcium-Rich Foods to Improve Bone Strength

by JOSH DUVAUCHELLE

5 of the Best Calcium-Rich Foods

If you or someone you know is worried about osteoporosis, bone fractures and bone strength, set aside that bottle of calcium supplements for a moment and consider this: food that is high in calcium may be better for your bones than vitamin pills.

According to researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, women who get their daily calcium from the foods that they eat have healthier, stronger bones than women who take calcium supplements. This held true even though the total amount of calcium that women were taking via supplements was higher than average.

Not only is a diet rich in calcium better for your bones, but it may slash other health risks, too.

For example, unlike calcium supplements, dietary calcium helps protect you from kidney stones (a potential side effect of taking calcium supplements). While calcium supplements have been linked to a higher risk of heart attacks, the same is not true for calcium-rich foods.

The Best Calcium-Rich Foods for Bone Health and Osteoporosis

Depending on your age and lifestyle, most men should aim for 1,000 milligrams of calcium a day while women should aim for 1,200 milligrams daily.

Your doctor or a registered dietitian can help you calculate exactly how much calcium you need, as well as what to look for in foods and supplements to help you achieve your bone health goals.

Your health professional may recommend considering one or more of the following foods, all of which are very high in bone-strengthening calcium!

1. Fish

Fish might not come immediately to mind when thinking of osteoporosis-friendly foods, but they are a rich source of vitamins and minerals.

Whether it is a tuna salad for lunch or grilled salmon steaks for dinner, you have many options! Canned fish are great for calcium, while fatty fish are high in vitamin D (which helps improve calcium absorption).

A single 3.75-ounce can of canned sardines nets you 351 milligrams of calcium.

2. Beans

Protein-packed beans are an easy meal that is also powerful for bone health. When looking at 1/2-cup serving sizes, cooked pinto beans get you nearly 40 milligrams of calcium, red beans have 25 milligrams and white beans provide a whopping 81 milligrams.

Beans are also a high source of fiber, and scientists have recently been exploring new research that suggests a fiber-rich diet can help prevent osteoporosis by slowing the breakdown and re-absorption of the calcium in your bones!

3. Dark Green Leafy Vegetables

When you are about to sit down to your meal of beans, try tossing them into a flavorful salad! Dark green leafy veggies are high in minerals, including calcium. For example, 1/2 cup of cooked kale has nearly 50 milligrams of calcium, while a 1/2-cup serving of Chinese cabbage has nearly 80 milligrams of calcium.

Dark green, leafy vegetables are also an excellent source of vitamin K. This vitamin helps with calcium absorption, and research suggests it can help prevent bone fractures in postmenopausal women who have osteoporosis.

4. Dairy

Milk is a common go-to for dietary calcium, and for the right reason. From 2% milk (300 milligrams of calcium in a cup) to yogurt (332 milligrams of calcium in 3/4 cup), dairy is an easy way to satisfy your calcium requirements quickly.

It's important to note that contradicting research suggests that for some people, eating too much animal protein can actually increase how quickly your bones lose their calcium, and increases your risks of weak bones.

If you are worried about that, fortified beverages make for a healthy, plant-based alternative to dairy. From cashew milk to coconut yogurt to soy cheese, there is a plant-based option for any of your favorite dairy products.

5. Omega-3-Rich Foods

Multiple studies suggest that diets high in omega-3 healthy fats may improve bone health, especially when combined with foods that are also high in calcium.

Lucky for you, some snacks and meals have both! Examples include tofu, nuts, flaxseed and shellfish.

Osteoporosis Diet 101: How to Improve Calcium Absorption

No person is an island, and no individual ingredient is digested on its own. Nutrition and digestion are complex processes, and you can help your body digest and absorb the most calcium out of your food by keeping a few pointers in mind:

- **Your body cannot absorb calcium without vitamin D.** Many foods contain both, but healthy UV-protected sun exposure can quickly boost your levels.
- **Don't think just in terms of calcium.** Vitamin K, zinc and magnesium also help to promote bone health by increasing both calcium absorption and your bone mass.
- **Spread out your dose.** Don't eat all of your day's calcium in just one meal, as your body needs time to break it down. For maximum absorption, spread your calcium intake out across all your meals and snacks.

You'll also want to avoid certain ingredients and foods that reduce how much calcium your body can absorb. After all, what is the use of eating more calcium-rich foods if you cancel out their benefits?

- **Too much salt.** Sodium increases how much calcium your bones lose.
- **Too much protein.** Sulfate is a by-product of your body burning protein for energy, and sulfate increases

calcium loss.

- **High-oxalate foods.** Oxalate binds with calcium, so you pass it out when you go to the bathroom. Examples include chocolate, berries and spinach.
- **Alcohol and caffeine.** Too much of either can weaken your bones. For example, alcohol affects how your body can use vitamin D, which is critical for calcium absorption.

Today, consider adding at least one of the above osteoporosis foods to your next meal and see the difference that a healthy diet has on your bone health, bone strength and your overall health and well-being!