

Calcium + Vitamin D Supplements for Breast Cancer Survivors

Why do I need calcium and vitamin D?

Calcium is the mineral in your body that makes up your bones and teeth and keeps them strong. It also helps to keep your muscles, nervous system and heart healthy. The best way to get calcium is by eating foods that are high in calcium. If you do not get enough calcium through your food, a supplement may be another option. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium and should be taken along with calcium.

Supplements such as calcium and vitamin D may decrease your risk of fractures, falls and bone loss.

What is the recommended daily intake for calcium and vitamin D according to the US Institute of Medicine?

Age Group	Recommended Daily Intake (from all sources)	
	Calcium	Vitamin D
Premenopausal	At least 1000 mg	600 to 800 IU
Above 50 years old or postmenopausal	At least 1200 mg	800 to 1000 IU

Important Note:

Do not take more than 2500 mg of calcium or 4000 IU of Vitamin D each day unless ordered by your doctor.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

What foods provide calcium?

Foods like milk, yogurt and cheese provide calcium in your diet. Other foods high in calcium include canned salmon, dark green leafy vegetables, and calcium-fortified juices and cereals. Below is a list of common foods and the amount of calcium they provide. Your James dietitian, nurse, pharmacist or doctor can provide you with a complete listing of foods that are high in calcium.

Food	Calcium (mg)
Yogurt, plain, low fat, 8 oz.	415
Yogurt, fruit, low fat, 8 oz.	315
Cheddar cheese, 1 ½ oz shredded	300
Milk, non-fat or reduced fat, 8 fl oz.	300
Orange juice, calcium fortified, 6 fl oz.	200-260
Salmon, pink, canned, solids with bone, 3 oz.	180
Ready to eat cereal, calcium fortified, 1 cup	300

What foods provide vitamin D?

Vitamin D can be found in foods like vitamin D fortified milk and milk products, fish and egg yolks. Exposure to sunlight (15 minutes each day is ideal) also provides vitamin D.

If the amount of calcium and vitamin D that you eat does not meet the recommended daily intake, your doctor may ask you to take a calcium + vitamin D supplement or a multivitamin.

What calcium supplements are available?

There are different forms of calcium found in supplements, the most common being calcium carbonate and calcium citrate. The amount of “elemental” calcium in a supplement is what is important. “Elemental” calcium is the amount of calcium in a supplement that your body can absorb. The recommended daily intake for calcium (found on page 1 of this handout) refers to the amount of “elemental” calcium. Below are some of the most common over-the-counter calcium supplements:

Caltrate	OsCal	Viactiv	Tums EX	Citracal
Caltrate + D	OsCal + D	Tums Regular Strength	Tums Ultra	Citracal + D

Are certain calcium supplements better than others?

Calcium products like “coral calcium,” “oyster shell calcium” or products that list calcium from a “natural” source are no different. They all contain elemental calcium. One difference is that calcium citrate is easily absorbed if you have decreased stomach acid.

How do I take supplements?

Calcium supplements come in several forms (tablet, chewable tablet, capsule and liquid). Chewable tablets should be chewed well before being swallowed. You should drink a full glass of water after taking your calcium supplement.

Calcium supplements should be taken with meals and in divided doses for better absorption. Your body can only absorb 500 to 600mg of calcium at a time.

Some supplements may change how well other medicines work. Tell your doctor or pharmacist about any medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and herbal products.

Are there any side effects from supplements?

Common side effects may include gas, bloating or constipation. You can lessen these side effects by spreading out your doses during the day. Call your doctor if these side effects do not lessen or make you feel worse.