Taking Calcium and Vitamin D Supplements After Parathyroid Surgery

This handout explains how to meet your daily calcium and vitamin D needs after your parathyroid surgery.

Calcium is important for people of all ages for good health. Calcium is a mineral that helps form and maintain healthy bones and teeth. It is needed throughout your life. Most of your bone mass is built when you are a child or young adult. After the bone building period ends, bone mass must be maintained.

The main way to build and maintain bone mass is to have a diet rich in calcium and to take vitamin D.

The body does not use calcium well if you do not get enough vitamin D. Vitamin D also decreases bone loss and lowers your fracture risk. A natural source of vitamin D is the sun. Given the risks to sun exposure we suggest taking a vitamin D supplement. Calcium needs are based on the amount of bone and tissue growth during phases of life.

Daily Calcium and Vitamin D Needs

	Ages	Calcium (mg)	Vitamin D (IU)
Young People	9-18	1300	800
Women	19-50	1000	800
	51-70	1200	1000
	71+	1200	1000
Men	19-50	1000	800
	51-70	1000	800
	71+	1000	1000

Foods with Calcium

250-300 mg of Calcium

- 2 pieces cheese pizza (1/4 of 14” pie)
- 8 oz. milk (cow, almond, rice, soy, or fortified)
- 6 oz. low fat yogurt
- 8 oz. calcium-fortified orange juice or other fruit juices
- 1 oz. cheese. Hard cheese has more calcium
- 3 oz. sardines, canned, drained, including bones
- 1 cup macaroni and cheese, homemade
- ½ cup tofu with calcium
- 8 oz. frozen collard greens

200-250 mg of Calcium

- 1 cup macaroni and cheese, packaged
- 6 oz Greek yogurt
- 8 oz broccoli

150-200 mg of Calcium

- ½ cup cottage cheese
- ½ cup ice cream or frozen yogurt
- ½ cup au gratin potatoes
- 1 cup cream soup made with milk
- 3 oz. salmon, canned with bones
- 1 taco with beef and cheese
- 2 frozen calcium fortified waffles
- 4 oz baked beans

100-150 mg of Calcium

- 1 cup broccoli
- ½ cup kale
- ½ cup oysters
- ½ cup custard
- 1 cup sherbet
- ½ cup bok choy, cooked
- ½ cup turnip greens, cooked
- ¾ cup mustard greens, cooked
- 3 oz. herring, canned
- ¾ cup soybeans, cooked
- 2 pancakes (4" diameter)
- 1 calcium fortified English muffin
- 1 package of oatmeal

Be sure to check the nutrition label because calcium and vitamin D content varies by brand.

Supplements

If you're not meeting your daily calcium needs through your diet, think about adding calcium tablets. Calcium tablets take the form of calcium carbonate, calcium citrate, calcium gluconate, or calcium lactate.

Calcium Citrate

- Can take anytime during the day.
- Does not need stomach acid to absorb it.
- Gentle on the stomach.

Calcium Carbonate

- Must be taken with food to be absorbed.
- Stomach acid is needed to absorb.
- **Do not** take with antacids.
- May cause gas, constipation, and bloating.
- Look for "USP" on label, this means it will dissolve in normal amount of stomach acid.

Calcium gluconate and calcium lactate cost more and contain less calcium per pill so you'd have to take more pills to get the same amount of calcium.

Other Medicines

Calcium (supplements) may not mix well with other medicines. Talk with your health care provider about taking calcium. They can help you decide the best time of the day to take your calcium.

If you take medicine to decrease stomach acid (acid blockers) or **use** antacids daily, calcium citrate is better than calcium carbonate.

How to take Calcium

Calcium is best absorbed if taken with meals and in smaller doses. Avoid taking more than 600 mg of calcium at one time. Split your dose and take it throughout the day with 8 oz. of water. Chewable forms of calcium should be chewed well.

Side Effects

Side effects with the proper use of calcium are rare. Calcium use can cause constipation and gas. Drink plenty of fluids and eat fiber to avoid these problems. If these measures are not helpful, try switching to a different form of calcium.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2025. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7330.