

# Vitamin D and Calcium Guidelines

<http://www.webmd.com/diet/news/20101129/guidelines-increase-vitamin-d>

Nov. 30, 2010 - New guidelines for vitamin D call for increasing the recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of vitamin D... and calcium.

## Relationship between calcium and vitamin D:

- Vitamin D helps you absorb calcium.
- Calcium is needed for strong bones, muscles, and nerves.
- Vitamin D seems to also be part of the immune system. Some researchers think that this can have effects on the risk of complications from infectious disease, development of cancer, and development of autoimmune diseases.
- Most people who stay indoors most of the time and live in Northern latitudes are at a higher risk for vitamin D deficiency.
- If you get too much calcium or vitamin D, you can get constipation, kidney stones, and irregular heart rhythms.

## How much vitamin D do I need?

New **total** (not supplement) recommended daily Vitamin D intake, according to the Institute of Medicine:

Birth-1 year, 400 IU/day  
Age 1-13 years, 600 IU/day  
Age 14-18 years, 600 IU/day

Age 19-70 years, 600 IU/day  
Over age 70, 800 IU/day  
Pregnant and breastfeeding women, 600 IU/day

*Note: These levels are still controversial, and some doctors and science researchers believe they should be 2-3 times higher.*

## How much vitamin D do I get from my diet?

Not much. That's why it's added to milk, 400 IU per quart.

- Foods made from milk, like cheese and ice cream, are usually not fortified.
- Vitamin D is also added to some other "fortified" foods, like orange juice and soy milk. Check the labels.

## How can I tell if I need a vitamin D supplement?

You can get a vitamin D blood test.

- Levels below 30 nmol/L are too low. Levels above 125 nmol/L are too high.
- Levels over 50 nmol/L are healthy for most people.

## How can I tell if I'm taking too much Vitamin D?

The new upper level **safe** intakes for vitamin D are:

Birth-6 months, 1000 IU/day  
6-12 months, 1500 IU/day  
Age 1-3, 2,500 IU/day

Age 4-8, 3,000 IU/day  
All others, 4,000 IU/day

## What vitamin D supplement is best?

There is not a giant difference between supplements, despite exaggerated claims on labels.

I recommend using the cheapest, smallest (easy to swallow) supplement you can find, and taking it daily.

I do **not** recommend exceeding the recommended **safe** levels above, unless directed by your doctor.



### **How much calcium do I need?**

New **total** (not supplement) recommended daily calcium intake, according to the Institute of Medicine:

Age 1-3, 700 mg/day  
Age 4-8, 1000 mg/day  
Age 9-18, 1300 mg/day

Women 19-50, 1000 mg/day  
Women over 50, 1200 mg/day  
Men 19-70, 1000 mg/day  
Men over 70, 1200 mg/day

### **How much calcium do I get from my diet?**

If you eat a regular diet including 1 glass of milk and 2 pieces of cheese, you are getting about 1000 mg calcium per day.

You can do the math yourself:

**Without** dairy products, the average American diet contains about 250 mg of calcium. Add:

1/2 cup ice cream, 90 mg  
1 slice cheddar cheese, 200 mg  
1 cup milk or calcium-fortified orange juice, 300 mg

1 cup yogurt, 450 mg  
1 cup of cottage cheese, 1300 mg  
"Tums 500," 500 mg each

### **How can I tell if I need a calcium supplement?**

If your diet usually includes less than 1000-1200 mg calcium a day, you might want to take a supplement of 500-1000 mg daily.

Split up larger doses, because your body can't absorb more than about 500 mg of calcium all at once.

- Proton pump inhibitors, which some take for acid reflux, make your blood calcium go down.
- Water pills called furosemide (brand name Lasix) make your blood calcium go down.
- Aluminum and magnesium antacids make your blood calcium go down.

If you use these medications, you may need more calcium. Ask your doctor.

### **How can I tell if I'm taking too much calcium?**

The new upper level safe intakes for calcium are:

Birth to 6 months, 1000 mg/day  
Age 6-12 months, 1500 mg/day  
Age 1-8, 2500 mg/day

Age 9-18, 3000 mg/day  
Age 19-50, 2500 mg/day  
All other age groups, 2000 mg/day

- Half as much for people who are on a "renal diet" for kidney disease. Kidney disease makes your blood calcium go up.
- Blood pressure medicines that contain thiazides (hydrochlorothiazide/HCTZ or chlorthalidone) make your blood calcium go up.
- If you have these conditions/medications, you might not want to supplement calcium. Ask your doctor.

### **What is the best calcium supplement?**

There is not a giant difference between supplements, despite exaggerated claims on labels.

I recommend using the cheapest, smallest (easy to swallow) supplement you can find, and taking it daily.

I do **not** recommend exceeding the recommended **safe** levels above, unless directed by your doctor.

