Why Is Vitamin D Important?

Your body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium. If you do not get enough vitamin D, you are at greater risk of bone loss and broken bones.

You can get small amounts of vitamin D from a few foods, like fortified milk, liver and fatty fish (e.g., wild mackerel, salmon and tuna). Your skin can make vitamin D from the sun, but getting too much sun can be harmful, and sunscreen blocks out vitamin D.

See NOF’s vitamin D recommendations (below) to find out how much is recommended for you. To get enough vitamin D, many people need to take a supplement. Ask your healthcare provider whether you should have a test to check your vitamin D levels. You may be at risk of vitamin D deficiency if you:

- Are age 60 or older
- Spend little time in the sun
- Live in a nursing home or are homebound
- Have a medical condition or take a medicine that affects vitamin D levels
- Have very dark skin
- Are obese

Other Nutrients for Healthy Bones

In addition to calcium and vitamin D, there are other nutrients that appear to be important for bone health. Some examples are:

**Vitamin K.** Sources include dried plums (prunes) and certain dark green leafy vegetables like kale, collard greens, spinach, mustard greens, turnip greens and Brussels sprouts.

**Potassium.** Sources include dried plums (prunes), tomato products, raisins, potatoes, spinach, sweet potatoes, papaya, oranges, orange juice, bananas and plantains.

**Magnesium.** Sources include spinach, beet greens, okra, tomato products, artichokes, plantains, potatoes, sweet potatoes, collard greens and raisins.

**Vitamin C.** Sources include red peppers, green peppers, oranges, grapefruits, broccoli, strawberries, Brussels sprouts, papaya and pineapples.

Try to eat 1.5 cups of fruit and 2 cups of vegetables every day for bone and overall health.

Vitamin D Recommendations

- **Adults under age 50** need a total of 400-800 international units (IUs) of vitamin D every day.**
- **Age 50 and older** need a total of 800-1,000 IUs of vitamin D every day.**

**Some people need to take more vitamin D than others. Talk to your healthcare provider about your personal vitamin D needs.

Note: According to IOM, the safe upper limit for vitamin D is 4,000 IUs per day for most adults.

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Your Guide to a Bone Healthy Diet
Step 1: Estimate the number of servings you have on a typical day for each type of food. One serving is equal to approximately:

- 8 oz. or one cup of low-fat or fat-free milk
- 6 oz. of low-fat or fat-free yogurt
- 1.5 oz. of low-fat cheese

The amount of calcium in fortified foods and juices ranges from 80-1,000 mg. Read the label to find out how much calcium is in each serving. Examples are juices, soy milk, almond milk and cereals.

Step 2: List the estimated number of servings of each food item under the Calcium Calculator’s “Servings Per Day” column.

Step 3: Multiply the number of “Servings Per Day” by the number of milligrams (mg) under “Calcium.” So, if you have about two servings of milk per day, multiply 2 x 300 to get a total of 600 mg of calcium from milk.

Step 4: After you have calculated the total amount of calcium for each product, add these totals in the right-hand column to get your Total Daily Calcium Intake. Make sure to include 250 mg for “estimated total from other foods.” If you know you’re getting more than 250 mg of calcium from other foods each day, increase this number. See calcium-rich vegetables list (on the right).

Step 5: To find out how much additional calcium you need, subtract your Total Daily Calcium Intake from the amount of calcium recommended for your gender and age (on the left). This number is the total calcium you need each day. You can get this amount by having another serving of a calcium-rich food or by taking a calcium supplement.