

FEEDING YOU THE FACTS

CALCIUM

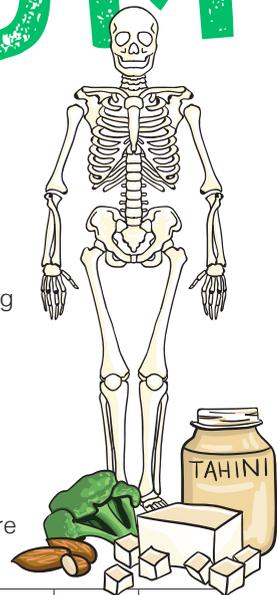
We all know that we need calcium for healthy bones and teeth, but many still believe that we need cow's milk and dairy products to get it. Do vegans fall short of this essential mineral?

WHY DO WE NEED IT?

Calcium is a vital component of bones and teeth, but it's not just growing children that need it. Our bones are constantly being remodelled, so it's important to obtain calcium regularly in our diet! It is also essential for cell signalling, nerve transmission, and normal function of muscle and hormones. Deficiency can result in weak bones and nails, muscle cramps, confusion, memory loss and depression.

ARE WE GETTING ENOUGH?

Whilst government surveys suggest that some women and teenagers are falling short, children generally meet the calcium recommendations.



Age	0 - 12 Months	1 - 3 Years	4 - 6 Years	7 - 10 Years	Boys 11 - 18	Girls 11 - 14	Girls 15 +	Adults
Amount recommended (milligrams per day)	525	350	450	550	1,000	800	700	700

FOODS TO INCLUDE

A healthy vegan diet should provide you with plenty of calcium. Rich sources include tofu (made with calcium sulphate), fortified breakfast cereals and plant-based milks, dried figs, green leafy veg (broccoli, cabbage, kale), sesame seeds and tahini (sesame seed paste used in hummus), tempeh (fermented soya beans), wholemeal bread, pulses (peas, beans and lentils), almonds and Brazil nuts.

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is often overlooked, and many people are unaware that deficiency is common in the UK, especially during the winter!



WHY DO WE NEED IT?

When we think bone health we think calcium, but vitamin D is just as important. Adequate intake prevents rickets, a bone disorder that has started to increase in the UK. Rickets (osteomalacia in adults) results in softening and weakening of the bones, increasing the risk of fractures and bone deformities. Sufficient vitamin D intake is particularly important under the age of 18 when most of our bone mass is established.

ARE WE GETTING ENOUGH?

Government surveys suggest that over 40 per cent of teenagers and nearly a third of older adults are deficient in vitamin D during the winter months. We get some vitamin D through our diet, but most is made in our skin in response to sunlight exposure. In the winter in the UK, sunlight doesn't contain enough of the right type of ultraviolet rays for our skin to be able to make vitamin D.

HOW MUCH DO WE NEED?

The government recommends 10 micrograms of vitamin D per day.

There are two types of vitamin D, D2 is always vegan but D3 (used in many breakfast cereals) is often extracted from sheep's wool, so not suitable for vegans. However, some D3 is now produced from mushrooms and lichen – this is suitable for vegans.

The best plant sources include vitamin D-fortified plant-based milks, vegetable margarines and breakfast cereals (if labelled suitable for vegans). Also, look out for 'vitamin D mushrooms' grown under UV light.

DO YOU NEED A SUPPLEMENT?

Yes – the government recommends that everyone takes a supplement during winter. Those who spend most of their time indoors, covered up or have dark skin should take a supplement all year round due to reduced absorption from sunlight.

HANDY TIPS:

Vitamin D helps you absorb calcium, so even if you eat plenty of calcium, it could go to waste if you don't get enough vitamin D.

Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin, so taking it with foods that contain fat (avocado or peanut butter) will help you absorb it better.