



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Calcium

This information describes the common uses of Calcium, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

What is it?

Calcium is a mineral that you need for many bodily functions. It also helps build and maintain healthy bones. It's found in foods such as dairy products, dark greens, legumes, nuts, and fish.

If you don't get enough calcium from food alone, your healthcare provider may recommend you take calcium supplements. Calcium supplements come as tablets or capsules.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Calcium is used to:

- Prevent cancer
- Lower high blood pressure
- Decrease risk of heart disease
- Prevent bone loss (osteoporosis)

Calcium also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

Calcium that you get from food is safe. Talk with your healthcare provider before taking supplements. Supplements are stronger than the calcium you get from food. They can also interact with some medications and affect how they work. For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of using calcium may include:

- Constipation (having fewer bowel movements than usual)
- Gas
- Chalky taste in the mouth
- Dry mouth
- Higher risk of urinary stones (in long-time users)
- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Increases risk of stroke when taking high-dose calcium supplements

What else do I need to know?

- Talk to your healthcare provider before taking calcium supplements if you have hypothyroidism (less thyroid hormone in the blood), high blood calcium levels, or low blood phosphate levels. Calcium can worsen these conditions.
- Talk to your doctor before taking calcium supplements if you're taking medications such as digoxin (Lanoxin®) to treat a heart condition. Calcium may increase the risk of irregular heartbeat.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you're taking tamoxifen (Nolvadex or Soltamox™) as part of your cancer treatment. Calcium may increase the risk of abnormally high levels of calcium in the blood. This can increase

the risk of kidney stones.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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