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Calcium

Calcium is an essential nutrient which has a number of important roles in the body; it's needed for normal blood clotting, for nerve and muscle function, for the maintenance of teeth, for energy metabolism, and for enzymes involved in digestion. Calcium is also key to helping to build and maintain healthy bones.

BONE HEALTH

Children and teenagers

Childhood is an important time for building strong, healthy bones, and getting enough calcium is an essential part of this. The teenage years in particular are crucial for bone building, and calcium requirements are greater than at any other time in life. Bones not only grow in length at this stage but in strength too; around 90% of the adult skeleton is formed by the age of 18.

Unfortunately, many teenagers, particularly girls, are short of calcium. The latest National Diet and Nutrition Survey¹ reported that over ten per cent of 11- to 18-year-olds are not getting the calcium they need. Some teenage boys are also missing out. These figures have fallen from the previous national survey where almost one in four teenage girls were found to have inadequate calcium intakes². Future surveys will reveal if this is a real change, but the fact remains that **large numbers of girls in the UK don't get enough calcium.**



Adults

An adequate calcium intake is important throughout adult life. Although the majority of our skeleton is laid down during the teenage years, bones continue to strengthen until our mid thirties. After this, we naturally begin to lose bone, and for women there is a marked increase in bone loss around the time of the menopause. The loss of bone as we age can eventually result in fragile bones which are at an increased risk of fracture. Getting enough calcium is important for both men and women throughout our later years to help keep bones healthy.

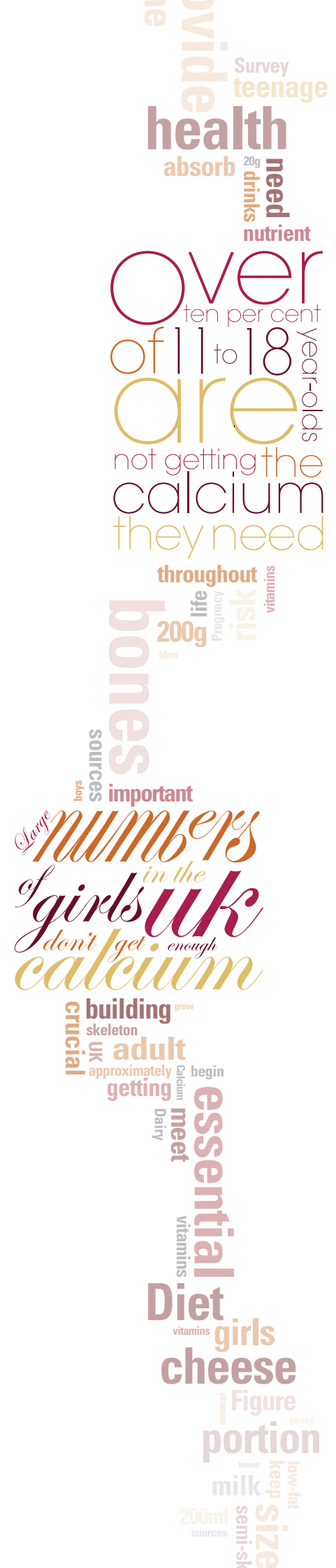
Pregnancy and breastfeeding

A pregnant woman's body adapts to absorb more calcium from the food she eats so her recommended calcium intake isn't increased compared with before pregnancy. But it is still important for her to get enough calcium to help build strong, healthy bones in her developing baby.

During breastfeeding, the demands for calcium are higher due to the secretion of calcium into breast milk; breastfeeding women require an additional 550mg of calcium a day.

A balanced lifestyle

Other nutrients in a balanced diet including protein and vitamin D are also important for bone health. And healthy bones need regular exercise to keep them strong too; like muscles, bones suffer if they're not used.



Dairy foods and calcium

Milk and dairy products such as cheese and yogurt can be a great way to help to meet calcium needs. Dairy foods are the main providers of calcium in the UK diet, and the calcium they contain is easy for the body to absorb and use.

The table below shows the recommended calcium intake at different ages, and the portion sizes of dairy that can help meet these needs.

Age / sex	Calcium needs* (mg/day)	Portion sizes
1-3 years	350	100ml whole/semi-skimmed milk ** (122mg/124mg) 80g yogurt (160mg) 15g cheese (111mg) These portion sizes provide approximately 395mg of calcium
4-6 years	450	130ml semi-skimmed milk (161mg) 100g yogurt (200mg) 20g cheese (148mg) These portion sizes provide approximately 510mg of calcium
7-10 years	550	150ml semi-skimmed milk (186mg) 125g yogurt (250mg) 25g cheese (185mg) These portion sizes provide approximately 620mg of calcium
Male 11-18 years	1000	250ml semi-skimmed milk (310mg) 200g pot of low-fat yogurt (324mg) 45g of cheese (378mg) These portion sizes provide approximately 1010mg of calcium
Female 11-18 years	800	200ml semi-skimmed milk (248mg) 200g pot of low-fat yogurt (324mg) 30g of cheese (small matchbox size) (252mg) These portion sizes provide approximately 825mg of calcium
Men and women 19 years and over	700	200ml semi-skimmed milk (248mg) 150g pot of low-fat yogurt (243mg) 30g of cheese (small matchbox size) (252mg) These portion sizes provide approximately 740mg of calcium

* This is the Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI); a figure set by the Department of Health which describes the amount of a nutrient that is enough to meet the dietary needs of most people in a group (97%).

** The Department of Health recommends that semi-skimmed milk may be introduced to children from the age of two years, providing they are good eaters and growing well, otherwise whole milk should continue to be given.



