

Calcium Confusion

Q: Why do we need calcium? Calcium chelate, calcium carbonate, calcium citrate, coral calcium, liquid calcium...? What does it all mean? Which one is the one for me?

A: There are so many different calcium supplements on the market these days and picking the right calcium for you can be a very daunting task indeed. Calcium is a difficult mineral for the body to absorb and most people have trouble maximizing the benefits from their calcium supplement. The calcium supplement I usually recommend to my patients is calcium citrate. Other calcium supplements, like chelate and carbonate, need more digestive acids for adequate absorption. Liquid calcium, I recommend for patients with indigestion. It should be taken in the evening with magnesium as it is soothing to the stomach. Vitamin D, the sunshine vitamin, is important for proper assimilation of calcium. It can also be included in your calcium supplement as it not found in many foods and most people do not get enough exposure to the sun. Certain foods decrease the absorption of calcium. These can include black tea, rhubarb, spinach, and high fibre foods. My recommendation is not to eat these foods at the same time as you take your calcium supplement. Dividing doses of your calcium throughout the day is also important as the body only absorbs little bits at a time.

Calcium is important for all of us—both young and old. Children need calcium to develop healthy bones and teeth and keeping a careful eye on calcium intake in childhood and young adulthood is what helps to prevent osteoporosis later on in life. As adults calcium can help protect us from a variety of health concerns from osteoporosis to anxiety and depression to colon cancer to muscle pain.