



American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

Calcium: An Important Part of a Healthy Body

As you grow, you need calcium to build a healthy body. It keeps you strong so you can do well at things like sports, dancing and school activities.

Getting plenty of calcium while you are young also makes you strong and keeps you looking good for your entire lifetime.

In fact, your body's need for calcium is very high between the ages of 9 and 18 years. However, most young people in the United States do not get enough calcium in their diets.

Calcium is a mineral that many parts of your body require. Its main job is to build strong bones and teeth. About 99 percent of your body's calcium is in your bones and teeth. A very small amount of calcium is in body fluids, such as blood. But this small amount performs vital functions, including the following:

- Keeping a strong heart beat
- Controlling blood pressure
- Making muscles move
- Helping blood clot
- Sending nerve messages

If you make the right choices, the food you eat will provide the calcium you need. If you do not get enough calcium, your body will take calcium from your bones to support other vital functions, weakening the bones.

Although bones may appear lifeless, they are alive and growing. Existing bone constantly is being renewed through a process called remodeling. Your body needs a good supply of calcium to fuel this process.

Bones serve as a "bank" for calcium. When you are young, your body can deposit calcium in your "bone bank" by increasing your bone density. Density means how closely packed together the materials in your bones are. Dense bones are strong bones.

As you get older, you lose the ability to bank calcium. By the time you reach about 30 years of age, your bones reach their peak bone density. That means your bones are as dense (or packed with calcium) as they will get — for life.

After that time, you can no longer deposit extra calcium in your bone bank. Instead your body withdraws calcium from your bone bank.