

Start Today to Build Strong Bones



by **Neville H. Golden, MD, FAAP**

Bone strength is just one reason to eat right and get enough exercise, but it's an important reason.

By building strong bones as a teen you can protect yourself from osteoporosis, a weakness of bones in later life. It's not too soon to think about your adult skeleton; about half the bone of your adult body is made during the teen years.

How can you build strong bones?

Maintain a healthy weight

To build strong bones, maintain a healthy body weight. People who lose too much weight because they exercise too much or don't eat enough of the right foods may develop weak bones. Adolescent girls whose menstrual periods stop because they exercise too much or have an eating disorder are more likely to get osteoporosis.

Eat a balanced diet rich in calcium

Many adolescents don't get enough calcium. Boys and girls should have 1200 to 1500 mg of calcium each day. Calcium pills can help, but calcium from food is better.

The best place to find calcium is in dairy products. Some teens worry that dairy products are fattening, but this isn't true. One cup of skim milk has as much calcium as whole milk, and only has 90 calories. Green vegetables, tofu, and fortified foods and drinks are good, too. (see below)

Limit soda

Drinking too many sodas may prevent you from getting the calcium you need from milk. Next time you're thinking about a soda, have milk or calcium-fortified juice instead.

Do more weight-bearing exercises

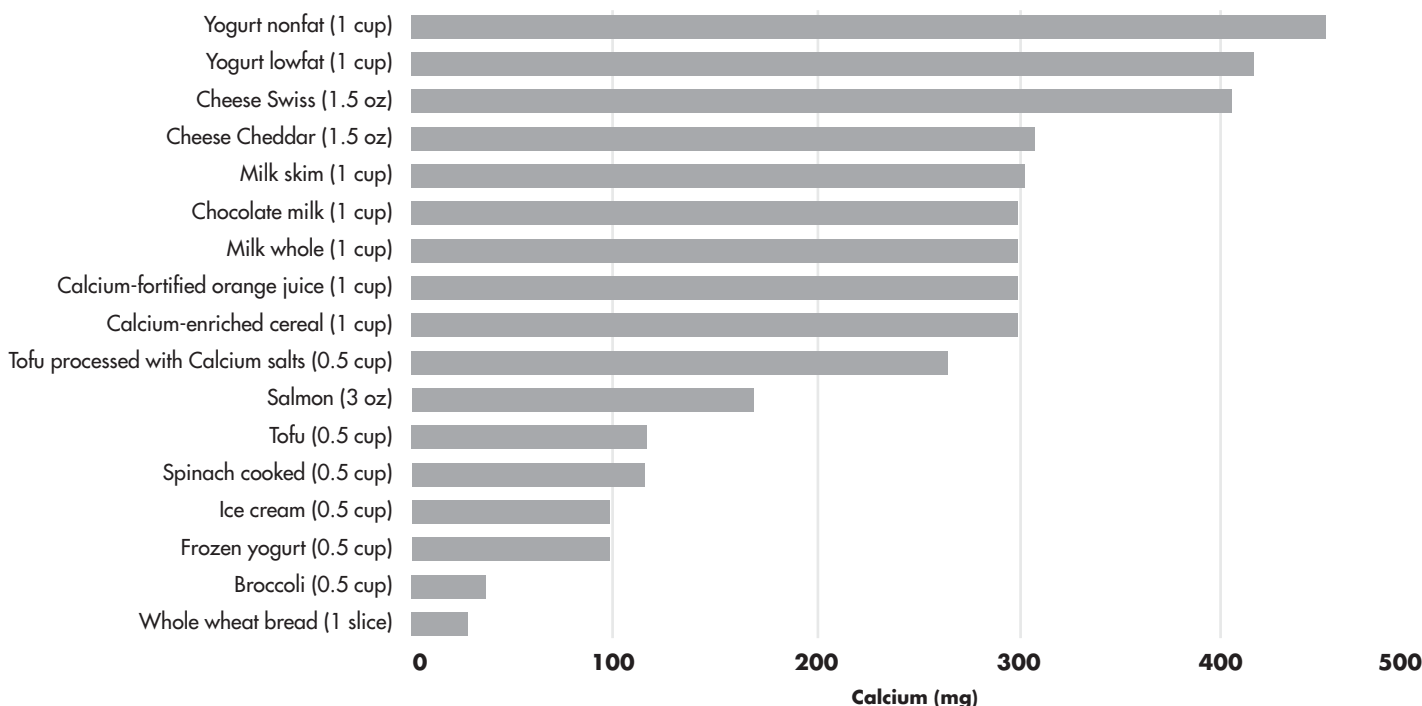
Swimming and bike riding are good for your health, but it's weight-bearing exercise that builds strong bones. Try to walk, jog, dance, or jump rope 3 to 4 times a week.

Want to learn more?

Check out the National Bone Health campaign, at www.CDC.gov/powerfulbones

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Calcium Content of Foods (by serving size)



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