

How to balance exercise, diet and calcium intake when living with hypoparathyroidism

Living with the rare condition hypoparathyroidism (hypopara), means your parathyroid glands are either absent or do not function properly, effecting your body's calcium levels.¹ Calcium is vital for your body to function, so it is essential to ensure your calcium levels remain balanced during each day.¹ The calcium in your body gets used when you are exercising and it is also affected by your diet, alcohol consumption, stress, and illnesses such as infections.¹

Here are some helpful tips to help maintain a balance with your calcium levels and your lifestyle.



1. Exercise:

Exercise is different for each person living with hypopara. Some people may be able to complete strenuous exercise, whereas others may find it more difficult and will need to take a gentler approach.² Check out the [low impact exercises you can complete at home](#) article in the Hypopara Life series.

During exercise it is possible that you may feel symptoms of low calcium, such as tingling and cramps, which can cause fatigue.² However, you may be able to build up your strength gradually over time.²

Your diet may also affect you during exercise; therefore, it is recommended to eat a starchy, low fat meal 2-3 hours before exercise as well as calcium rich snacks an hour before and after.²



2. Diet:

Your diet is an essential part of living with hypopara. Eating a balanced diet of regular meals with high calcium content, whilst keeping hydrated, is a good way to help keep your calcium levels stable.³ However, getting a good balance of calcium in your diet can be tricky. Try to not overdo it, especially eating too much dairy, as this may be harmful to your kidneys.³

Examples of calcium rich food and drinks that do not contain dairy include, calcium-rich mineral water, tinned sardines, tofu, tahini, leafy green vegetables, some pulses, and nuts.³ For calcium rich recipe inspiration, check out the [nutrition section](#) on Hypopara Life.

It is also worth noting that some foods may upset your calcium levels if over consumed. High levels of food which contain phosphate may also be toxic.³ Therefore, it is recommended to have fresh food when possible. Examples of foods high in phosphate include many fast food items, frozen or canned foods, and fizzy drinks.³ Foods high in the molecule oxalate do not necessarily impact on calcium levels, but may increase the risk to form calcium-based stones in the urine.⁴



3. Calcium levels:

It is important to keep your calcium levels balanced throughout the day and to realise when you might need to top them up. You might find your symptoms vary depending on what time it is. In an early episode of the HypoparaExchange podcast series Professor Brandi explained, “patients cannot introduce supplements of calcium during the night, and...in the morning the patients can suffer a lowering of calcium in the serum in the circulation.” To help with this, Isabel who lives with hypopara, drinks a glass of warm milk before going to bed at night.

If you find yourself winding down (only you will know this is happening), do act when you can.⁵ Hypopara can vary from person to person, so it is vital you know when you are experiencing low calcium symptoms. Common signs are feeling cold, twitching, and in some cases it can lead straight to cramps.⁵

To ensure your symptoms do not get any worse, leading to a hypo (hypocalcaemia), take action straight away with medication and calcium rich snacks.⁵ Remember to speak with your health-care professional about receiving nutrition and exercise advice, as they might be able to refer you to an expert.

This information is intended for a general audience outside of the US. The information provided is not intended for professional and or medical advice. Please consult a healthcare professional for further advice.

This article was developed in collaboration with Professor Ketteler MD, FERA, professor of medicine and Director of the Department of General Internal Medicine and Nephrology at the Robert-Bosch-Hospital in Stuttgart, Germany.

1. Parathyroid UK (2021) Understanding the basics: <https://parathyroiduk.org/living-with-hypopara/self-help-guide/understanding-the-basics/>
2. Parathyroid UK (2021) Exercise: <https://parathyroiduk.org/living-with-hypopara/self-help-guide/exercise/>
3. Parathyroid UK (2021) Diet: <https://parathyroiduk.org/living-with-hypopara/self-help-guide/diet/>
4. Healthline (2021) What Is a Low-Oxalate Diet?: <https://www.healthline.com/health/what-is-a-low-oxalate-diet#:~:text=Oxalate%20is%20a%20naturally%20occurring,oxalate%20foods%20are%20from%20plants.>
5. Parathyroid UK (2021) How to manage your calcium levels – practical steps: <https://parathyroiduk.org/living-with-hypopara/self-help-guide/how-to-manage-your-calcium-levels-practical-steps/>