

# The Nutrient You Need For Bone Strength & Overall Health (Hint: It's Not Calcium)



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When you think about bone health, your mind might travel back to the "Got Milk?" campaigns that successfully cemented the concept that drinking milk daily would help us grow big and strong.

Today, calcium is still equated with strong bones, but you would be hard-pressed to find an article that doesn't instruct us to also pair our calcium with [vitamin D](#), the "Sunshine Vitamin." That's because, aside from being a mood-booster, [vitamin D](#) plays an important role in helping the body to effectively absorb calcium.

And yet, there's actually a *third* nutrient that also has to be part of the conversation: vitamin K2. And here's the kicker: It's a nutrient that some [estimate](#) most of the Western population is deficient in, even those consuming healthy diets.

# Understanding Vitamin K2: Why It's Crucial to Your Health

Vitamin K2 is, as you can probably guess, is part of the vitamin K family. You may have heard about vitamin K as being essential for [blood clotting](#), an activity regulated by the liver. Vitamin K2, specifically as the menaquinone-7 (MK-7) form, contributes to blood clotting, but because it's the most [bioavailable](#) of the K vitamins, it's also able to extend beyond the liver to activate K-dependent proteins in other systems, such as the bones and the vasculature, or blood vessels.

Where bone health is concerned, vitamin K2 activates a protein produced by bone cells called osteocalcin, which binds calcium ions to the bone mineral matrix, thus [strengthening](#) the skeleton. But without adequate vitamin K2, osteocalcin remains inactive and calcium is not directed to create stronger bones.

So how do we get enough Vitamin K2? In truth, I find it can be tough by diet alone.

While [vitamin K](#) can be found in leafy greens and other vegetables, natural vitamin K2 is harder to obtain. Still, it can be [found](#) in animal products, as well as bacterially [fermented foods](#) like mature cheeses, especially Gouda, and [natto](#).

So while ideally we would obtain our nutrients from food, I recommend vitamin K2 supplements as a viable and effective alternative. For example, a three-year [study](#) of healthy postmenopausal women marked the first clinical trial to show that a long-term (more than one-year) supplement of vitamin K (as MK-7) improves bone mineral density, bone mineral concentration, and bone strength.

Importantly, research also [showed](#) substantial benefits of a nutritional dose of vitamin K2 in inhibiting age-related stiffening of arteries.



# The Bottom Line: What You Should Do for Strong Bones

## 1. Don't wait until old age to focus on bone health.

Building and protecting our bone health is something that has to be considered when we're young. We acquire [90 percent](#) of our peak bone mass before age 20. Once we hit our peak bone mass in our late 20s or early 30s, that's all we will ever have. From there, it's a matter of maintaining and staving off bone loss as long and as much as we can.

## 2. Balance your nutrients.

Calcium and vitamin D are important nutrients, but you need to take them with Vitamin K2, specifically as MK-7. While vitamin D helps the body to more effectively absorb calcium, without vitamin K2, the body won't properly utilize calcium and therefore build stronger bones. (It's also important to know what other [nutrient pairings](#) are ideal for your health.)

You may not think much about your bone health these days, but remember that bones are the body's foundation — they must be strong so that we can live active, healthy, fulfilling lives well into our senior years.