

Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Vitamin D and Calcium to Prevent Falls and Fractures in Older Adults

Vitamin D and calcium supplements do not help prevent falls and fractures

WASHINGTON, D.C. – December 17, 2024 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on vitamin D, calcium, or combined supplementation for the primary prevention of falls and fractures in community-dwelling adults. Based on the evidence, the Task Force recommends against taking vitamin D, with or without calcium, to prevent fractures in women who have gone through menopause and men ages 60 and older. **This is a D grade.** The Task Force also recommends against taking vitamin D to prevent falls in this group. **This is a D grade.**

Grade in this recommendation:

D: Not recommended.

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This recommendation applies to people who live at home, not in assisted living or nursing homes, and includes women who have gone through menopause and men 60 years and older. Importantly, this recommendation is not for people who are taking vitamin D or calcium for other medical reasons and does not include people diagnosed with osteoporosis, vitamin D deficiency, or those who have a medical condition that affects how they absorb vitamin D. Those individuals should follow guidance from their healthcare professionals on how to stay healthy.

Falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults, and fractures can severely impact a person's quality of life. Falls and fractures can happen in people of all ages, but because they become more common as people get older, this recommendation is focused on falls and fractures in older adults.

“Preventing older adults from falling and breaking a bone is important to their ongoing health and independence,” says Task Force member John M. Ruiz, Ph.D. “Unfortunately, when we reviewed the latest evidence, we found that taking vitamin D with or without calcium does not prevent falls or fractures in older adults, so we recommend against these supplements for people who are not taking them for other medical reasons.”

Vitamin D and calcium are important to a person's bone health and overall wellness, so the Task Force looked at the evidence on whether supplements could help older adults avoid falling and breaking a bone. For this review, the Task Force combined two previously separate recommendations to give comprehensive guidance to healthcare professionals and patients. Based on the available evidence, including new evidence in older men, the Task Force found that these supplements provide no benefit in preventing falls or fractures and can lead to harms like an increased risk of kidney stones.

“The good news is there are evidence-based ways for older adults to maintain good bone health,” says Task Force member Goutham Rao, M.D., FAHA. “The Task Force recommends other effective preventive services related to falls and fractures including screening for osteoporosis in women and structured exercise programs to prevent falls in older adults who are at increased risk of falling.”

The Task Force's draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from December 17, 2024, to January 21, 2025, at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm. Please note the

public comment period has been expanded from the standard four weeks to five weeks to account for the holidays.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of people nationwide by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Ruiz is a professor of clinical psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of Arizona. He is also the associate director of inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) in the University of Arizona Cancer Center.

Dr. Rao is the chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, and chief clinician experience officer for the University Hospitals (UH) Health System. He practices family medicine and leads the medical obesity treatment program. He also serves as division chief of Family Medicine at UH Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital. In addition, Dr. Rao is the Jack H. Medalie professor and chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine.

Contact: USPSTF Media Coordinator at Newsroom@USPSTF.net / (301) 951-9203