



## 1 **Many people do not consume enough calcium in their diets**

An estimated 3.5 billion people are at risk of calcium deficiency and approximately 90% are in Africa and Asia. Foods that are rich in calcium, such as dairy, tend to be less available and less affordable in low-income settings.

## 2 **Calcium is essential for health**

Diets low in calcium have negative consequences on bone health, such as osteoporosis in adults and rickets in children. Beyond bone health, calcium supplementation can help reduce blood pressure, cholesterol levels and recurrent colorectal tumors.

## 3 **Calcium is especially important during pregnancy**

Calcium supplementation during pregnancy reduces the risk of hypertensive disorders and associated complications, including preeclampsia (a potentially life-threatening condition), maternal morbidity and preterm birth. In populations with low dietary calcium intake, calcium supplementation is recommended for pregnant women.

## 4 **Sources of dietary calcium**

Dairy products are some of the richest sources of calcium, but calcium is also abundant in some plant-based foods, such as leafy green vegetables. However, the bioavailability of calcium should be considered because many foods contain anti-nutrients that prevent the body from using calcium in foods. Some food processing techniques, such as fermentation or parboiling rice, can make the calcium more bioavailable or increase the calcium in the food.

## 5 **Food can be fortified with calcium**

Twenty-eight countries currently have policies allowing or mandating the fortification of staple foods with calcium, including rice, maize and wheat flour. Given the challenges with meeting calcium needs through the diet alone, staple food fortification is a cost-effective method to improve calcium intake in a population. Calcium can be added on to an existing fortification program, and it will not interfere with other micronutrients.