Low Calcium in Your Blood (Hypocalcemia)

What is hypocalcemia?
Hypocalcemia (hi-po-kal-se´me-ah) means the calcium level in your blood is lower than normal. Calcium is a mineral that is very important to your body. It is necessary for healthy bones and teeth. Calcium is also needed for blood clotting and normal nerve and muscle functions. A blood test can be done to check a calcium level. Organs in your body, including your parathyroid, kidneys and intestines, help maintain your calcium level.

What can cause Hypocalcemia?
- Surgery to the thyroid and parathyroid glands may lower the calcium level in your body.
- Low levels of Vitamin D and or Magnesium. These two nutrients help your body absorb calcium.
- Certain types of cancers or blood disorders
- A serious complication of chemotherapy called Tumor Lysis Syndrome. This happens when the body rapidly breaks down tumor cells after chemotherapy, which may cause hypocalcemia
- Medicines called bisphosphonates. These medicines can be used to treat osteoporosis or bone metastases.
- Kidney Disease or problems with your kidneys.
- Alcoholism
What are signs of low calcium?

- Muscle spasms or twitching
- Numbness or tingling around your mouth or fingertips
- Stiffness and muscle cramping
- Changes in your mood, depression or irritability

How is your calcium level checked?

- Your blood will be drawn to check the calcium level.
- If you had thyroid surgery, your blood calcium level will be checked while you are in the hospital.
- Your doctor or nurse may tap the side of your cheekbone to check for any twitching by the corner of your mouth and jaw. This is called a Chvostek’s Sign.
- Your doctor or nurse may put a blood pressure cuff on your arm and then watch for any hand twitching or bending at the wrist. This is called a Troussseau’s Sign.

Treatment for hypocalcemia

- If your calcium level is slightly below normal, you can add more calcium to your diet. Dairy products are the best source for calcium: yogurt, milk, cheddar cheese, and cottage cheese are examples. You can also eat foods like sardines, salmon, red beans, or foods that are calcium-fortified such as cereal or orange juice.
- You may also need to take calcium pills that have Vitamin D. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium.
- If you have very low calcium levels, you may need to have replacement calcium through an IV. This means it is given to you through your veins.