

Low Calcium in Your Blood (Hypocalcemia)

What is low blood calcium?

Low blood calcium means the calcium level in your blood is lower than normal. This problem is also called **hypocalcemia** (hi-po-kal-se´me-ah). Calcium is a mineral that is very important to your body. Almost all the calcium in your body is in your bones and teeth. Calcium is important for blood clotting and normal nerve and muscle functions. A blood test can check your blood calcium level. Organs in your body, including your parathyroid gland, kidneys and intestines, help control your calcium level.

What can cause low blood calcium?

- Surgery to your thyroid and parathyroid glands may lower the calcium level in your body.
- Low levels of vitamin D and 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 occurs when your body quickly breaks down tumor cells after chemotherapy.
- Medicines, called bisphosphonates, are used to treat osteoporosis or bone metastases.
- Kidney disease or problems with your kidneys
- Alcoholism

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

What are signs of low blood calcium?

Low calcium in your blood can cause the following problems:

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

How is my calcium level checked?

- Your blood will be drawn to check your 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 your wrist. This is called a **Trousseau's Sign**.

What is the treatment for low blood calcium?

- If your calcium level is slightly below normal, you can add more calcium to your diet. Talk with a dietitian about which foods are best to eat.
- 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 be given calcium through an intravenous (IV) catheter. A catheter is a long, thin, flexible tube that is placed in your vein.