**Types of Calcium**

**Calcium Carbonate:** Most calcium supplements currently on the market are in the form of calcium carbonate. While calcium carbonate contains the highest percentage of elemental calcium (40%), it is not absorbed as well as some other forms. Calcium carbonate requires extra stomach acid so that it can be dissolved and absorbed. It is best to take calcium carbonate supplements with food or a meal because the extra food will cause the stomach to increase its production of stomach acid.

**Calcium Citrate:** Calcium citrate is the second most common calcium supplement available on the market. It contains a lower percentage of elemental calcium (21%), but it is more easily absorbed by the body. It is not necessary to take calcium citrate with food because the citrate provides enough acid to help the body absorb the calcium.

**Calcium Phosphate:** Calcium phosphate contains the second highest percentage of elemental calcium (38%). Calcium phosphate can be taken with or without food, but may not be absorbed as well as calcium carbonate or calcium citrate.

**Calcium Lactate & Calcium Gluconate:** These forms of calcium supplements are not widely available and contain small amounts of elemental calcium.

**Coral Calcium:** Makers of coral calcium made claims that this calcium supplement not only improves bone density, but it can also help to prevent diseases like cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, multiple sclerosis and lupus. While it can, in fact, help to improve bone mineral density, it is not effective in helping to prevent any other disease.

**Dolomite, Bone Meal & Oyster Shell:** It is best to avoid these forms of calcium supplements because they may contain high levels of lead and other toxic metals.
When choosing a calcium supplement, it is also important to consider the following:

**Elemental Calcium:** Refer to the supplement label to determine how many milligrams (mg) of elemental calcium it contains. This is the amount of pure calcium contained in the supplement and the amount that your body can use to help preserve bone density. For example, if a calcium carbonate supplement contains 500 mg of calcium carbonate, it will only contain 200 mg (or 40%) of elemental calcium. Most labels clearly state how many mg of bone-building elemental calcium are contained in the supplement.

**Purity:** It is best to choose a supplement that has a USP (United States Pharmacopeia) symbol on the label. This symbol should ensure reliability as well as safe levels of other minerals or metals.

**Absorbability:** To determine how well a calcium tablet will absorb in the stomach, place it in a small amount of warm water for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. If the tablet does not dissolve in this time, it will probably not dissolve in the stomach. Remember that chewable tablets usually dissolve well because the chewing action helps to break them down before they enter the stomach. Calcium in any form is best absorbed when it is taken in amounts of 500 mg or less throughout the day.

**Tolerance:** Some calcium supplements may cause stomach discomfort such as gas or constipation. If increasing water and fiber intake do not help with this, another form of calcium should be tried. Remember to increase your intake of calcium gradually. Several studies have suggested that magnesium and/or potassium, in addition to calcium, may help to improve bone density, but researchers believe that further investigation is needed.

*Calcium supplements may interfere with the absorption of other supplements or medications. To avoid this, you may need to take your calcium supplement at a different time of day. Always consult with your doctor before taking any new medication or supplement.*

Some information adapted from the National Institutes of Health and the American Dietetic Association.