

Education

Hypocalcemia

What is hypocalcemia?

Hypocalcemia means that the level of calcium in the blood is lower than normal.

How does it occur?

Some possible causes of hypocalcemia are:

- You are not getting enough calcium or vitamin D from your diet. (Vitamin D helps your body take calcium from the food you eat and use it to build bone.)
- Your intestines are not absorbing calcium.
- Your parathyroid gland is not making enough parathyroid hormone, which affects calcium levels in the blood.
- You have kidney disease or your pancreas is inflamed.
- You have low magnesium levels. A lack of magnesium can be caused by alcoholism or other diseases that affect how your body absorbs nutrients.
- You are taking a medicine that affects the level of calcium in your blood. For example, cimetidine, a drug that makes your stomach produce less acid, reduces the amount of calcium in your blood. Some diuretics can also lower the amount of calcium and magnesium in your blood.
- You have too much phosphate in your blood. Many cola drinks contain a high amount of phosphate. Drinking too much of these drinks can result in high phosphate and low calcium in the blood.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of severe hypocalcemia include:

- numbness or tingling around the mouth or in the feet and hands
- muscle spasms in the face, feet, and hands
- depression
- memory loss
- hallucinations.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and examine you. You will have blood tests to confirm the diagnosis. Your parathyroid gland and kidneys will also be checked.

How is it treated?

Your treatment will depend on the cause. You will usually take an oral calcium supplement. Severe hypocalcemia is usually treated with shots of calcium gluconate. You may have injections of vitamin D or take vitamin D supplements. If you have low magnesium levels, your magnesium deficiency must be corrected to treat the hypocalcemia.

How long do the effects last?

Most people recover completely, especially if the problem is diagnosed early enough. Severe hypocalcemia can be life threatening.

How can I help prevent hypocalcemia?

Make sure that you get enough calcium and vitamin D each day, either in foods or as supplements.

Hypocalcemia that is caused by problems with the parathyroid gland or the kidneys cannot be prevented.

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