

Tips and Calculations: Adding Calcium to Boneless Meat Diets for Nondomestic Cats



Boneless meat diets, such as ground turkey, ground beef, or boneless chicken, do not have enough calcium to support growth and strong bones. There are many forms of calcium you can add to the diet, but **calcium carbonate** is commonly available and easy to find.



PRACTICAL TIP 
Grinding calcium tablets in a coffee grinder works well to make a powder.

Mixing the powder thoroughly into the diet or combining the powder with beef or chicken blood helps ensure your cat will eat all of the supplement.

HOW MUCH CALCIUM DO I ADD?

It takes 5,000 milligrams (mg), or 5 grams, of **calcium carbonate** to balance 1 pound of boneless meat. That is ten 500-mg tablets or about 4 teaspoons of powder (when using products labeled 600 mg for each ½ teaspoon) per pound of meat.



Sample Calculations

A bobcat fed 1.5 pounds of meat:

Calcium carbonate **powder** (600 mg per ½ teaspoon)

- $1.5 \text{ (pounds of meat)} \times 4 \text{ (teaspoons per pound)} = 6 \text{ teaspoons POWDER/day}$

Calcium carbonate **tablets** (500 mg each)

- $1.5 \text{ (pounds of meat)} \times 10 \text{ (tablets per pound)} = 15 \text{ TABLETS/day}$



A tiger fed 12 pounds of meat:

Calcium carbonate **powder** (600 mg per ½ teaspoon)

- $12 \text{ (pounds of meat)} \times 4 \text{ (teaspoons per pound)} = 48 \text{ teaspoons POWDER/day}$

Calcium carbonate **tablets** (500 mg each)

- $12 \text{ (pounds of meat)} \times 10 \text{ (tablets per pound)} = 120 \text{ TABLETS/day}$

BONE MEAL AS A SOURCE OF CALCIUM

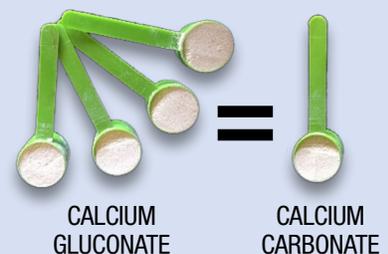
Human-grade bone meal is a great choice. However, because it is a mix of both calcium and phosphorus, a larger amount of bone meal is needed to balance a boneless meat diet compared to calcium carbonate alone. Calcium amounts in bone meal vary greatly from product to product, so consult your veterinarian or veterinary nutritionist.

CAUTION! Ensure the commercial bone meal product you select is tested for heavy metals and other contaminants. This information may be found on the label or you may need to contact the manufacturer. Bone meal labeled for garden use should never be fed to animals.

The calcium sources mentioned here are some of the most common, but there are other options as well. Consulting a veterinarian experienced with nutrition for nondomestic cats or a veterinary nutritionist may be helpful as you decide on the best approach for your cats.

DID YOU KNOW?

Not all calcium sources are alike. For example, it takes 4 times more calcium gluconate than calcium carbonate to give the same amount of calcium to your cat.



This Animal Care Aid is part of a series developed to provide information about nondomestic cat health and husbandry. Refer to the other topics covered in the series for more information on nondomestic cat care.

Questions? Email us at CenterforAnimalWelfare@usda.gov

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