



Bone-A-Fide HEALTH

by Susan Thomas Springer, for The Bulletin Special Projects

Calcium is something women have long known is important; it builds stronger, denser bones and can help stave off osteoporosis. Yet many women still aren't getting enough.

"Say cheese!" is more than just a way to make you smile for your photo op. Cheddar, along with other foods, can keep your bones happy too.

Calcium is something women have long known is important; it builds stronger, denser bones and can help stave off osteoporosis. Yet many women still aren't getting enough.

Dieticians say a little knowledge about calcium and how it is absorbed can go a long way toward healthy bones. Current research is helping women understand the best ways to get enough—whether that calcium comes from dairy products, vegetables or supplements.

"It's always absorbed better naturally. It helps to get it in your diet," said Annie Williamson, Bend Memorial Clinic Dietician.

Some of the top dairy sources include yogurt, milk and cheese. You can choose lower fat products without sacrificing the amount of calcium you receive.

If you're thinking about calories, lower-fat mozzarella is a better choice than hard cheeses.

Even the milk in your latte counts.

Williamson said that three helpings a day usually provide the right amount of calcium

For women who want to eat less dairy or who are lactose intolerant, there are still plenty of good food choices. Broccoli, green leafy vegetables such as spinach, sardines, figs, oranges and salmon are all good sources of calcium.

Also, many foods are fortified with calcium. So grains, cereals, tofu and even orange juice can provide calcium. Read the labels on these fortified products to determine how much you're

Calcium Recommendations:

- The calcium requirement for teenagers is 1,300 milligrams.
- The requirement is 1,000 milligrams until age 50.
- After age 50, it increases to 1,200 milligrams.



getting from them.

Supplements can add calcium where the diet leaves off. Dietitians say it's important to discuss the details of supplements with your doctor. Some types need to be taken with food and others need to be taken several times a day, which may not be realistic for your lifestyle.

To get enough calcium, you need to look beyond it. Calcium is better absorbed with weight-bearing exercise and with protein.

"We're looking at vitamin D as being a real player here," said Carol Schrader,

dietician with Cascade Healthcare Community.

Schrader said our bodies need vitamin D to absorb calcium. Good sources of D are sunshine, liver, milk fortified with vitamin D, egg yolks and multivitamins. Even in sunny Central Oregon, people can have low levels of vitamin D. Schrader said it's a good thing that testing for vitamin D deficiency is becoming more common.

"Bone mass tends to peak somewhere in the 20s," said Schrader. She added it helps if you've built a good store at that crucial age, but it's never too late to be more attentive to bone health. Risk factors include being underweight, having eating disorders, a diet low in calcium, a family history, inactivity, alcohol abuse and smoking.

"There's really only one way to know what's going on inside," said Williamson.

She recommends women have a bone mineral density test (sometimes referred to as a DEXA scan) to measure the amount of minerals, including calcium, in order to estimate bone strength.

Armed with that knowledge, women can make some diet and lifestyle changes to stay healthy and strong.



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