



OPTIONS CENTER NUTRITION TOPIC



DAIRY PRODUCTS

Why not eat dairy products? Don't I need them to get enough calcium to build bones and prevent osteoporosis?

You do need a certain amount of calcium for building bones, and calcium has other functions in the body too. But you do not need dairy products for calcium, as has been amply demonstrated in Japan, China, parts of Africa, and elsewhere where they are not traditionally used. Bone development is perfectly normal, and bone breaks caused by osteoporosis—the thinning of the bones with age—are actually much rarer than in the U.S. and Europe. The fact is, there is plenty of calcium in green vegetables, beans, fortified juices, and many other foods.



Researchers at Pennsylvania State University found that for girls in their peak bone-building years, ages 12 to 18, getting extra calcium made no difference at all in bone growth. It is a bit like dumping extra bricks at a construction site, hoping they will become part of the building. They won't. What did make a difference in bone growth was exercise. Exercising teens had clearly better bone development than their more sedentary classmates.

Similarly, Harvard researchers found in a 12-year study of nearly 78,000 women that dairy calcium didn't help bone strength at all. Those who got the most calcium from dairy sources actually had nearly double the hip fracture rates, compared to those who got little or no dairy calcium. Advertisers have tried to capitalize on the myth that dairy products, or calcium in general, prevents bone breaks. However, scientific studies have clearly shown that greatly increasing your intake of calcium, from dairy products or any other food, does little or nothing for the bones.

Other factors do make an important difference. Exercise is the key. And vitamin D, from sunlight or vitamin supplements, also helps keep bones strong. Fruits and vegetables provide vitamin C to build your bones' inner collagen matrix. And it is important to understand that osteoporosis is not a condition of inadequate calcium intake, for the most part. Rather, it is a condition of overly rapid calcium loss. It is accelerated by sodium (salt) and excessive animal protein in the diet, smoking, and other factors. Adding extra calcium, either from dairy products or supplements, is largely ineffective at preventing or slowing it.

Excerpted from Breaking the Food Seduction by Dr. Neal Barnard, President and Founder of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

Options Center for Health and Education
4316 N. Prospect Road
Peoria Heights, IL 61616
(309) 685-7721 • email: options@mtco.com
www.options-center.com