



Osteoporosis Canada

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## **Is it time to stop your calcium supplements?**

There have been some very unsettling news reports recently about a possible connection between calcium supplements and the risk of heart disease. A lot of us are asking ourselves if it is time to stop our calcium supplements. We therefore are happy to provide you with some information to help you make that decision.

The excerpt below first appeared in the January 29th, 2008 edition of COPING. That was the first time there was a possible concern about a relationship between calcium intake and heart disease noted in the scientific literature. Osteoporosis Canada always looks at new scientific information to see if it should change our current recommendations. Now, as in 2008, we recommend the use of calcium in moderation.

### **So, are you taking too much calcium?**

Everything in moderation is a very good guide. This applies to calcium as well. There is no need to go overboard on calcium. Just the right amount will do to keep your bones healthy. Going overboard won't make your bones any healthier.

Health Canada currently recommends a total calcium intake (from the combination of diet and supplementation) of

- 1000 mg for men and women under age 50
- 1200 mg for men and women over age 50.

So, to know if you need to take a calcium supplement, you really need to know how much calcium you are getting in your diet. Here is a very simple way to calculate this.

First, give yourself 300 mg of calcium simply for eating. This is because there is calcium in a variety of foods such as bread, muffins, oranges, etc. At the end of the day, even without eating any high calcium foods, you can't help but get about 300 mg of calcium in your daily diet.

Now, add 300 mg for any of the following high calcium foods:

- 1 cup of milk (any milk, including whole milk, 2%, skim or chocolate milk)
- 1 cup of fortified soy milk, almond milk or rice milk
- 1 cup of fortified (or calcium rich) orange juice
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of yogurt
- 2 slices of cheese
- one chunk of cheese (about the size of a half deck of cards).

Don't forget to add in any calcium you might be getting from a multivitamin tablet.

How did you do? Write your total here: \_\_\_\_\_.

**If you are already getting close to the recommended amount of calcium for your age group**, then you are doing great. Getting all of your calcium from your diet is the best way to go. There is nothing magic about a calcium supplement. Your body needs calcium and you are already getting the calcium you need from your diet. You therefore should not take a calcium supplement.

**If you are not getting the recommended amount of calcium for your age group**, then you should consider taking a calcium supplement to make up for the difference. Your body and your bones need to get enough calcium each day. If you can't do that with diet alone, then taking a supplement is the right way to go for you.

Should you throw away your calcium supplements? Well in the end, it all depends whether you are getting enough calcium from your diet. Make sure your bones are getting enough calcium each day. Whether you get your calcium from your diet or from a combination of diet and calcium supplements is really up to you.

Don't forget - If you are taking a combination Calcium plus Vitamin D supplement and you are going to decrease your calcium supplement intake to stay within the guidelines of total calcium intake of 1000 or 1200 mg per day, make sure you reassess your vitamin D intake. You will be able to find a supplement with Vitamin D alone if needed.

Just remember: don't go overboard on calcium. Everything in moderation.