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### Calcium - Milk or Supplements?

Most people have heard that they should be getting more calcium. They know it's good for your bones, good for your nerves and heart. Most people know that milk is the best source of calcium there is. But, there are lots of people who don't like milk, who are allergic to milk, or who are intolerant of milk sugar. Getting more calcium is not easy if milk gives you gas, or cramps, or bloating! So, many people try to compensate by taking calcium supplement pills, or they pay the extra for the calcium-fortified orange juice. But, lurking in the back of our minds is always the question: "Is this supplement as good as the real food?"

Well, as least for calcium, the answer is good news! Researchers at Tufts University have found that people in their 70's did absorb the calcium from fortified orange juice, and from a common brand of supplement pills, as well as the calcium from milk! That is especially important for two reasons.

One is that as we age, our stomachs make less acid. And the less acid we have, the more difficult it is to absorb some nutrients, including minerals such as calcium. Taking a lot of antacids can also affect how well we absorb certain minerals, so don't overdo them.

Secondly, many elders do not eat as much of any food, and that can limit how much calcium is present in their diets. If you are willing to take orange juice, or the supplement pill, instead of more milk, then do so. It will improve your nutritional condition.

However, it is important to remember that milk provides a lot more than just calcium. Milk's protein, vitamin B-12, D, riboflavin and phosphorus are also very important, and not included in the orange juice or pill. If you can, do use dairy products, and get as many other food groups as possible into your eating plan as well. The more food groups we eat, the healthier we will be.

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