

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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If you heard the recent news about vitamin supplements not really helping, you might be left wondering if you should still be taking those calcium tablets every day too. The short answer is “probably yes”. All the studies that find big health benefits from vitamins and minerals, the protection from cancer, the reduction of high blood pressure, etc, have been studying people who get their vitamins and minerals from foods, in diets that contain lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low fat dairy products. There is no question that these diets are healthy! A lot of studies have found that we don't get those same benefits with vitamins and minerals in supplement forms.

But with all the benefits that are tied to calcium, should we stop taking calcium tablets? Calcium is important for more than just strong bones or avoiding osteoporosis. Calcium is part of the signaling system that gets messages from our nerves to our muscles. Without enough calcium the muscles don't get the message to move. In the extreme that would include our heart not getting the messages to keep beating! Calcium is also absolutely necessary for blood to clot, and to keep nerves working right. At least one very long study has found that people who either ate enough calcium or took calcium supplements had a much lower risk of colon cancers.

There are also suggestions from different studies that getting enough calcium from food is part of what the body needs to control blood pressure, and maybe even help control weight. The DASH diet for managing hypertension includes calcium as one of the essential minerals to counteract the effects of salt on our blood pressure.

Part of the trick is that calcium can not work alone. It must have enough vitamin D to do its job and to keep the right amount circulating in our blood. Recent research is also suggesting that we Americans are not getting nearly enough vitamin D in our diets either. The next set of dietary guidelines for our recommended daily intakes will probably increase in the recommended amount of vitamin D, to help manage the calcium questions.

But for now, it is still a good idea to take a calcium supplement unless you are drinking at least 3 or 4 glasses of milk a day. A good tablet will have 500 mg of less of calcium. We can't absorb more than that at one time, so anything extra will just be wasted. It will also have at least 200 IU of vitamin D in each tablet. The best vitamin D form is D3 (or cholecalciferol), that's what we absorb the best. A supplement that also includes magnesium is good, since this mineral works with calcium in many ways.

Take one tablet at a time, not several together. Again, if you get more than 500 mg you won't absorb it. Take them with meals. The food helps your body absorb more calcium and vitamin D. Don't take calcium supplements at the same time you take multivitamins or iron supplements. Calcium will prevent you from absorbing iron and zinc in the multis.

When you're reading the labels on supplement bottles, check how many pills you have to take to get the recommended dose. Some are so small you have to take 15 or 20 tablets a day! There is no extra benefit to calcium from coral or oyster shells. Both calcium citrate and calcium carbonate are kinds we can absorb easily. The citrate (as from 'citrus') or carbonate are what the calcium is tied to. We can't absorb pure calcium, that would be a rock! Calcium gluconate is not a very strong source of

calcium, you'll have to take lots of pills to get enough of calcium from this form. Calcium phosphate has phosphorus tied to it. There's no particular benefit to this form either.

Here's an easy way to get some of your daily calcium at dinner. Use low fat milk and reduced fat cheese to keep it healthy. Serve with strawberry and orange fruit salad.

### Cheese and Spinach Quiche

1 10 oz pkg frozen spinach, thawed and cooked	2 Tbsp flour
8 oz shredded sharp cheddar cheese	1 cup milk
2 eggs or equivalent egg substitute	1/8 tsp cayenne pepper
3 slices turkey bacon, cooked, crumbled	1 9 inch pie shell, unbaked

Preheat oven to 350° F. Drain spinach on paper towels or in colander. Toss cheese with flour and pepper in bowl. Stir in egg substitute, milk, bacon. Pour into pie shell and bake 1 hour. Serves 6.