

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Confused About Calcium?

For years we've been told to get enough calcium to keep our bones healthy. If you look at the shelves in a pharmacy, the number of calcium supplements would make you think that the only way to get calcium is from pills. And of course there are plenty of different kinds to choose from. Do you want coral calcium or 'natural' calcium? Calcium carbonate or calcium citrate? With or without vitamin D? Which form of vitamin D do you prefer? One pill a day or three? Care for any other added minerals with it, magnesium or zinc for example?

Calcium is one of the most popular supplements. Close to half the population takes a calcium supplement, either alone or combined with something else. So then, what are we to make of the reports that came out a few months ago that said calcium supplements might increase our risk of heart disease? Should we stop taking them completely?

First, let's remember that we can get calcium from foods! Dairy products are the best sources of calcium. We need about 1000 mg a day, and 3 glasses of milk will just about do it. We absorb calcium more easily from milk, cheese and yogurt than from any other foods or supplements. If the dairy product is fat-free then we don't need to worry about the saturated fats. We get the healthy proteins, also very easily digestible, and the minerals, calcium as well as potassium and magnesium. Lactose-free milk, cheese, yogurt and ice creams are just as good sources of calcium as regular products.

Other than dairy, canned fish such as sardines and salmon with the soft bones are also very good sources of calcium. Tofu made with calcium salt is a decent source, and some greens have a little too. But you'd need to eat 6 cups of cooked kale to equal the calcium in a glass of milk. And you wouldn't absorb all of it anyway!

That absorption is part of the problem with calcium. When we take a supplement we are dumping a very, very large amount of calcium into our systems. Our bodies can't use it all so fast. And it's in a form that is not so easily absorbed. So we're not getting as much as we might think, but

we get it one big lump.

Various studies have shown that increasing our calcium intake with pills does not help strengthen our bones the way more calcium from food does. And calcium pills do not help reduce or manage our blood pressure the way foods high in calcium will do.

Still, these big studies found that men who took high doses of calcium supplements were more likely to die from heart disease. In one study women for some reason did not have a higher risk. In another only those women taking very high doses of supplements had higher risks. But neither of these studies was planned to compare calcium and heart disease. They just asked people what they were eating and what supplements they were taking. Then they followed them through the years to see who died and from what causes. So neither of them is really strong proof.

We don't know for sure if calcium supplements will cause problems. But calcium from food has only been tied to good results! We should try to get all the calcium we need from food, either fat free dairy products, fish with bones or tofu made with calcium. If you really, really can't manage that, then use a low dose supplement. That means not more than 500 mg of calcium in each tablet. And take them spread out across the day, not all at once. Tally up how much calcium you get from your foods, and take just enough in a tablet to make up the difference. There's no benefit, and may be some danger from taking too much.

Here's a super easy, super fruity dessert with 2 good calcium sources. Substitute other fruits such as blueberries or chopped fresh or canned peaches for the blackberries each time you make it. For a fancier dessert, top with vanilla ice cream and sliced almonds. Enjoy!

Black Raspberry Cobbler

4 cups fresh or frozen black raspberries	1 cup sugar or low calorie equivalent
1 cup all-purpose flour	1 tsp baking powder
½ cup margarine, cut into bits	1 cup skim milk
1 32-oz carton fat free vanilla or plain yogurt	

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease an 8x11 inch baking pan. Spread berries in pan and sprinkle with sugar. Mix flour and baking powder together, then sprinkle over sugar. Dot with the bits of margarine. Pour milk over all. Bake for 30 minutes. Serve warm with a half cup of yogurt. Serves 8.

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