

EXTENSION CONNECTION – Strong Bones at Every Age

By An ISU Extension Nutrition & Health Specialist

Q. What should I eat for strong bones?

- A.** Dairy products are by far the most common food sources of calcium. Milk, cheese, yogurt, even pudding made with milk-are good sources of calcium, and products made from fluid milk also contain vitamin D. Milk, which has 300 milligrams (mg) of calcium per 8-fluid-ounce serving, and other dairy products are the primary sources of calcium that can be well-absorbed by the human body. In the United States fluid milk is also fortified with vitamin D, which makes dairy products doubly nutritious for bones.

In addition to certain vegetables (such as broccoli, kale, and collard greens), tofu, almonds, and fish with bones (such as sardines) are sources of calcium. Be aware, however, that it can take large quantities of these foods to equal the amount of calcium you would get in eight fluid ounces (1 cup) of milk. For example, it takes about four cups of cooked broccoli to equal the amount of calcium you would get in a cup of milk. But, when it comes to obtaining sufficient calcium, every little bit helps.

Q. What if I don't like milk?

- A.** Fortified milk alternatives are a good choice for some people who don't consume dairy products. Juices, bread, cereals, and snack foods are just some of the calcium-fortified foods you can find in a typical supermarket. In addition, increasing numbers of foods and beverages are fortified with vitamin D. Read the food labels to check whether the product you are buying is fortified with calcium and vitamin D because not all brands are enhanced. Incorporate some of these products into your diet, especially if you "don't do dairy."

Q. How should we meet the goals for strong bones at various ages?

- A.** *Children and Teens:* The easiest way to prevent osteoporosis later in life is to ensure adequate calcium and vitamin D intake throughout childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood.

Calcium deficiency is a particular concern among growing teenagers because teens tend to stop consuming dairy products. Research also shows that many teens do not get enough vitamin D.

Encouraging children and teens to drink milk with their meals is one of the best ways to help ensure that they obtain adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D. However, milk is not the only beverage option that can be used to ensure consumption of adequate amounts of calcium. For example, some brands of orange juice are fortified with calcium and vitamin D. Other calcium-rich foods like cheese, yogurt, and fortified snacks also add variety to the diet. Fortified and flavored milk beverages as well as powdered beverages prepared with milk are also good sources of dietary calcium.

Twenties, Thirties, and Forties: In the United States, 9 out of 10 women and nearly two-thirds of the men do not get sufficient calcium. Be sure to eat enough calcium and vitamin D-rich foods throughout your 20s because the ideal is to build up optimal bone mass by the time you are 30 years of age. After that, bone mass generally does not increase. However, there's still plenty of time left to make changes that will help maintain your bone mass, reduce bone loss, and reduce your risk of osteoporosis.

Fifty Plus: If you have done a good job of taking care of your bones so far, then you've won half the battle already. If not, it's still not too late to make amends. Ask your healthcare provider about supplements. Your calcium and vitamin D requirements are somewhat higher after age 50, and your body does not absorb calcium as efficiently as it did when you were younger. Continue to eat a diet rich in both calcium and vitamin D, but don't be surprised if you need supplements to make up the difference. *Information taken from "Food Insight" newsletter, by International Food Information Council.*

You may also call the toll-free ISU Answerline at 1-800-262-3804 for more answers to your questions.