

Study strengthens case for daily calcium pill

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A landmark study by University of Western Sydney researchers has found people over 50 who take calcium supplements suffer fewer fractures and enjoy a better quality of life.

The meta-analysis of over 63,000 people taking calcium or calcium and vitamin D supplements, conducted by the UWS Centre for Complementary Medicine Research (CompleMED), has been published this week in the prestigious international medical journal, *The Lancet*.

The study found long term daily calcium and Vitamin D supplements have the potential to reduce the risk of fracture in the elderly by almost a quarter.

Lead author, Dr Benjamin Tang, an Associate Researcher with CompleMED says the results confirm calcium supplements have an important role as a preventative medication.

"The research provides clear evidence that calcium supplements decrease fracture rates and loss of bone density in older people," he says.

"The efficacy of calcium supplements in reducing the risk of fractures later in life is comparable to more established preventative medicines such as aspirin and statins, which are widely taken to reduce the risk of cardiovascular events such as strokes and heart attacks," Dr Tang says.

If mineral loss from the bones is left unchecked over time it will make bones porous, brittle and prone to fracture - a condition called

osteoporosis.

Two million Australians have osteoporosis and the disease costs the nation's economy \$7.4 billion per year.

The report's authors analysed 29 studies from around the world which tracked the use and efficacy of calcium or calcium and Vitamin D supplements in 63,897 people aged 50 or over.

The study calculated a regular daily dose of 1200mg of calcium with 800 international units of Vitamin D provided the best therapeutic effect.

Dr Tang likens calcium supplements to superannuation payments where small regular contributions build to much larger pay off years down the track.

"The results showed the importance of starting supplements early in life, at around the age of 50, when bone mineral loss begins to accelerate."

"Persistence in particular pays off as people who reported taking their supplements at least 80 per cent of the time experienced a 24 per cent reduction in fractures. For those who were less rigorous with their routine the benefit was cut in half," he says.

The positive effect of taking calcium supplements increases with age, particularly for those 70 and older - an age group at high risk of fractures with complications which permanently reduce the quality of life or even cause death.

"Calcium supplements are relatively cheap to dispense, but the impact they have on your health and well being later in life is priceless," says Dr Tang.

Source: Research Australia

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