

# Nutrition professor discusses new calcium guidelines

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(PhysOrg.com) -- More emphasis needs to be placed on consuming calcium in light of the new 2010 dietary reference intake guidelines, says a Purdue University expert.

"While the biggest change is more behind the scenes - moving [calcium](#) from an adequate intake to a recommended dietary allowance - it is critical that people pay attention to the amount of calcium they are consuming daily," says Connie Weaver, a distinguished professor of foods and nutrition who is an expert in mineral bioavailability, calcium metabolism and bone health. "This move signifies that our nation's top health experts believe we need to take calcium more seriously."

Thirteen years ago when the dietary reference intake guidelines were updated, calcium, which is best known for making strong bones, was classified in the adequate intake category because the research community didn't know enough, Weaver says. She also was part of the team in 1997 that established the calcium dietary reference intake guidelines, which are created with oversight by the Institute of Medicine and the Food and Nutrition Board.

"Fast forward 13 years, and we probably have more information about calcium than any nutrient," says Weaver, who also is a member of the Institute of Medicine. "Calcium is very critical for every body function - without it your muscles won't contract and your nerves won't send messages. You either provide calcium through your diet or your body will strip it from your bone tissue. If your body robs the bones, they will

weaken and break."

It is recommended that the average young adult consume 1,000 milligrams of calcium a day, and those over the age of 50 should consume 1,200 milligrams a day. Weaver says this is the equivalent of eating a rich calcium source, such as a dairy product, at each meal. In addition to products with milk, other foods, such as orange juice, are fortified with the mineral, and [calcium supplements](#) are available.

Paying attention to calcium intake is especially important for girls ages 9 through puberty, when their bodies are creating half their bone mass, and women who are postmenopausal, an age when women start to lose bone mass because of hormone changes.

While calcium for women is emphasized, Weaver says it is just as important for men to consume the appropriate daily amount. In addition to good nutrition, weight-bearing exercise also helps reinforce bone strength for everyone.

"This activity communicates to your body that you need to build bone," Weaver says. "If you become bedridden and no longer place weight on your bones, your body doesn't think you need bone and starts excreting it through the urine."

Weaver also says that adequate [calcium intake](#) is just part of the puzzle.

"A well-balanced diet is essential because many nutrients work together," she says. "For example, the protein that shuttles calcium through the intestines to be delivered to the rest of the body is dependent on vitamin D."

And she also cautions that a few people need to make sure they are not overloading their bodies with calcium.

"This is a concern for people with chronic heartburn who are consuming more than the recommended amount of antacid and calcium-containing anti-acid supplements for relief. Anyone who has questions about their nutritional health should contact a doctor or dietitian."

Provided by Purdue University

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