

How Much Calcium Do I Really Need?

The jury is still out on this one. The "official" recommendations for calcium were most recently set in 1998 by the Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Sciences. They issued new Adequate Intake (AI) levels for calcium.

The new Adequate Intake (AI) for calcium are as follows:
0 - 6 months 210 mg
6 - 12 months 270 mg
1 - 3 years 500 mg
4 - 8 years 800 mg
9 - 18 years 1300 mg
19 - 50 years 1000 mg
51+ years 1200 mg
Postmenopausal women not taking hormone replacement therapy 1500 mg
Pregnant and lactating women (younger than 18 years) 1300 mg
Pregnant and lactating women (older than 18 years) 1000 mg

However, many professionals in the medical and scientific community doubt the dairy industry's and the US government's high calcium recommendations. They are more concerned with nutrient balance and preventing calcium loss.

In countries such as Japan, India, and Peru, the average daily calcium intake is as low as 300 mg per day (less than one third of the US recommendation for adults age 19-50), yet the incidence of bone fracture is quite low in comparison to the United States.

In another comparison, the daily calcium intake for African-Americans is more than 1000 mg, while it is only 196 mg for black South Africans. Oddly enough, the hip fracture rate for African-Americans is 9 times greater than the hip fracture rate for black South Africans.

Some speculate that the lower rates of fracture may be due in part to an increased level of Vitamin D, a new "healthy bone hero". It seems that excess calcium has a tendency to suppress circulating vitamin D. Others feel it may be a mix of cultural dietary habits.

Calcium is essential for bone health, but what levels of calcium intake are optimal, is still in a heated debate. While the verdict is out, reference our calcium chart for healthy dietary options. Also, you may choose to take a daily multi-vitamin or calcium supplement as extra insurance. We have a great feature on selecting the best supplement to help guide you through the barrage of options on the grocery and health store shelves.

Related Articles:

- Is High Calcium and Vitamin D Intake Harmful?