

## **Answers to Your Questions about Calcium in the Diet**

### **How is it absorbed?**

Calcium is absorbed in your small intestine by special cells. Vitamin D helps this process. Most of the calcium is then stored in bones for later use. Only 1% of the calcium stays in your blood where it regulates blood pressure and clotting of your blood.

Your need for calcium affects how much your body absorbs. When you need more calcium, for example, during pregnancy, your body absorbs more from food and loses less in urine.

The amount of calcium in your diet also affects how much calcium your body absorbs. When your diet is low in calcium, your body absorbs more from food.

### **What about oxalate in chocolate milk?**

Oxalates are substances found in some foods that bind (attach) to calcium. Your body can't absorb calcium when it is attached to oxalate.

If you drink chocolate milk, which is high in oxalates, your body will absorb the calcium in the milk. However, vegetables like spinach, Swiss chard, beet greens and rhubarb, are also high in oxalates and calcium. They are not good sources of calcium because the oxalates in them bind most of the calcium and make it unavailable to your body.

### **What about phytates - do they block calcium absorption?**

Phytates are substances found in plant foods that may bind to calcium. However, in the typical American diet they don't affect your body's ability to absorb calcium from whole grains, beans. It is not definitely known if vegetarians, who eat a lot of plant foods, absorb less calcium from plant foods because of their phytate content.

### **What about soft drinks?**

Soft drinks contain phosphorus which, in high amounts, can remove calcium from bone. Also, if you drink a lot of soft drinks (like teens) there is no room in your diet for good sources of calcium.

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- References:      1. Napier, Kristine. *How Nutrition Works*, 1995  
                     2. *The PDR Family Guide to Nutrition and Health*, Medical Economics Co.,

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