



Holistic Healthcare of Virginia

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The Low-Down on Calcium

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Calcium, the most abundant mineral in the body as it makes up nearly two percent of our total body weight is stored mainly in the bones including the teeth. It is important to keep the right balance in order to prevent osteoporosis and keep our risk low of cardiovascular disease and even colon cancer. We can get calcium in our diets from mainly dairy products. Choosing non-fat or low-fat dairy products is best, however, keep in mind that cottage cheese, because of the processing involved has the least amount of calcium. While green leafy vegetables contain calcium, it can't be absorbed because these green leafy vegetables also contain oxalates that bind with calcium, preventing its absorption. Canned fish that still has the bones, such as sardines, can give us calcium, but you must eat the bones. Sesame seeds, dried legumes, tuna and salmon all are good sources of calcium. Many products, including orange juice and cereal brands are now fortified with calcium showing the importance the government places on this mineral.

Even with a good intake of calcium in the diet, balancing calcium in the body can be tricky as there are a number of determinants effecting its bio-availability or absorption. Our age, for one, determines our body's ability to absorb this mineral as the older we get, the less we are able to absorb. Women after menopause have even more difficulty because the loss of estrogen affects the absorption of calcium. Luckily, Vitamin D is a nutrient that helps the body absorb calcium, however, most Americans are depleted of Vitamin D and therefore will also have difficulty absorbing calcium. Plus, when foods with oxalates (green leafy vegetables) and phytates (grains) are consumed, then the less calcium is absorbed in the body.

As well, you might think that simply taking more calcium will solve the problem, but that's the tricky part of calcium balance as the more intake of calcium, the less the body absorbs and it begins to excrete excess out of the bone. The converse is also true making this an inverse relationship: the less calcium intake, the more the body absorbs as it wants to hold on to whatever comes in. In order to avoid taking too much calcium, consider instead supplementing with Vitamin D to increase your absorption of calcium. If more calcium is warranted and a supplement becomes the source, consider taking it along with Magnesium (as calcium intake can deplete magnesium) in the ratio of 2:1 (Ca:Mg) and take the supplement between meals with the calcium supplement dose of 500 mg or less.