

Dairy milk better than calcium for bones and growth

Dairy milk scores over calcium in promoting bone growth and strength, according to a study conducted at Purdue University.

Connie Weaver, food and nutrition professor at Purdue University, found that the bones of rats fed non-fat dry milk were longer, wider, more dense and stronger than those of rats fed a diet with calcium carbonate.

Calcium carbonate is the most common form of calcium used in calcium-fortified foods and supplements.

Weaver said the study, funded by the National Dairy Council, is the first direct comparison of bone properties between calcium from supplements and milk.

'A lot of companies say, 'If you don't drink milk, then take our calcium pills or calcium-fortified food,'" Weaver said. 'There's been no study designed properly to compare bone growth from supplements and milk or dairy to see if it has the same effect.'

Data from Purdue's Camp Calcium, a research effort that studies how calcium and other nutrients affect bone growth, show that between the ages of nine and 18 people require 1,300 milligrams of calcium daily for optimal bone growth.

This is the equivalent of about four cups of milk or curd or the equivalent from cheese or other sources, Weaver said. After nine years, due mostly to peer pressure, the gap between calcium needs of youth and what they actually get widens, she said.

The study involved 300 rats that were divided into two groups. For 10 weeks, the rats were given all the nutrients they required, but one group was given dairy milk and the other was given calcium carbonate as the source of calcium.

After 10 weeks, the bones of 50 rats from each group were measured for strength, density, length and weight.

'We found those measurements were up to eight percent higher for those who had milk over calcium carbonate,' Weaver said.

Weaver said the study showed the rats raised on dairy milk still had advantages over those who were given calcium carbonate even later when they were given half enough calcium as dairy milk or calcium carbonate, according to a Purdue release.

These findings are slated for publication in the August issue of the Journal of Bone and Mineral Research.

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