



New research highlights Australia's calcium disgrace

Australian parents are being urged to monitor their children's intake of calcium-rich foods, with the latest research highlighting an alarming under consumption of this essential bone-building nutrient.

The findings from the latest **Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey**¹, a landmark report into the eating and exercise habits of the nation's children, reveal that Australian children were least likely to meet the daily requirements for calcium.

This year's **National Healthy Bones Week (2-8 August 2009)**, a joint initiative by Dairy Australia and Osteoporosis Australia, aims to highlight the importance of calcium-rich foods, such as dairy, in the development of healthy bones and the prevention of osteoporosis later in life. This is particularly crucial for school-aged children throughout their peak bone-building years.

To ensure that your children are consuming enough calcium, take the calcium challenge and check out the 'Calcium Cowculator' at www.healthybones.com.au to test their daily intake.

Naseema Sparks, CEO of Osteoporosis Australia, said "Calcium and exercise are important for growing bones, and parents need to be aware of their children's bone health."

"Calcium-rich foods, such as dairy, are needed in the daily diet to help build peak bone mass among children," she added.

According to Glenys Kerrins, Dietitian, Dairy Australia, the findings from this key research have serious implications for the future bone health of our children. "It is concerning that this alarming calcium deficiency amongst children has gone largely unreported," she said.

"The Survey reveals that a high percentage of children aged 9 to 16 years, particularly girls, are not meeting their daily calcium requirements. In fact, a staggering 82-89 per cent of 12-16 year old girls did not meet the estimated average requirement (EAR) for calcium," she added.

Ms Kerrins said "Obviously our kids are not consuming enough calcium – 3 serves of dairy everyday (a glass of milk, tub of yogurt and piece of cheese)² – can provide 100 per cent of the recommended daily intake of calcium for most Australians."

¹ 2007 Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra 2008

² One serve of dairy is equivalent to 250ml milk, a 200g tub of yogurt or 40g cheese.

"Dairy products are the biggest contributor of calcium in the Australian diet and provide a whole package of bone-building nutrients including magnesium, protein, phosphorous, potassium and zinc," she added.

Ms Sparks said "While consuming adequate calcium for building and maintaining bones is important throughout all stages of life, the school years are a critical time for building strong bones.

"The greatest rate of bone growth takes place at puberty, that's why the results from the National Children's Nutrition Survey are so concerning. A calcium-rich diet during adolescence helps maximise peak bone mass and helps reduce the risk of osteoporosis and fractures in later adult years." she added.

'Are You Feeding Your Bones?' is the theme of this year's **National Healthy Bones Week**, which encourages people of all ages to ensure they consume the recommended dietary intake of calcium for strong bones.

To also help the cause, Dairy Australia and Osteoporosis Australia are putting a call out to primary school students to nominate '**Australia's best bone-building school canteen**'. This initiative encourages students to consider the health benefits of the foods available from the school canteen and gain an understanding of calcium and other nutrients needed for growth and development of bones. Schools and students can win fantastic prizes donated by competition partner Rebel Sport.

For more information, visit www.healthybones.com.au.

Survey: The 2007 Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey assessed food intake and activity patterns in almost 4,500 Australian children aged 2-16 years.