Leyla Weighs In: The truth about bone health (part one)

written by Leyla Muedin MS, RD, CDN | May 30, 2018

It’s not just about calcium.

General nutrition advice is rampant with oversimplifications—some of which I find to be deleterious. An accurate example of this is the importance placed on a single mineral, calcium, for the prevention of osteopenia and osteoporosis. This is analogous to making the claim that, in a forest containing some 300 species of trees and plant life, a single species is the sole determinant to the health of that ecosystem. Pretty ridiculous, right?

I have witnessed downright panic from individuals when they forget to take their calcium supplement. Don’t forget there are plenty of calcium-containing foods, such as: collards, spinach, almonds, broccoli, kale, sesame seeds, turnip greens, beans and peas, tofu, canned salmon and sardines with bones…and I didn’t even mention dairy products yet! And if you make your own soup and stock from scratch, you’re getting the calcium that is released (leached) out of bones into the broth. Adding a teaspoon of vinegar to the simmering stock enhances this process.

We no longer recommend calcium supplements at doses of 1,200 mg a day—even for osteoporosis. Recent research reveals that excess calcium may promote calcifications in blood vessel walls and in soft tissue, like breasts. For this reason, we don’t recommend more than 500 to 700 mg of calcium daily from supplements.

There are other important micronutrients critical to bone health—such as vitamin D. I like to describe it as the bus that drives calcium to the bones (although not the only one—as you’ll find out next week). Without sufficient vitamin D, calcium is excreted through urine. What does all this mean? It’s highly likely that you’ve been absorbing less than 10% of the calcium in the supplements you’ve been taking—especially if you’re sun-phobic or slather on lots of sun block before going outside.

Stay tuned next week for Part II when I’ll discuss a few more critical players in bone health: Vitamin K, magnesium and omega-3’s. In the meantime, check out Dr. Hoffman’s Bone Health Protocol to get you started.

To your health!
Leyla Muedin, MS, RD, CDN