

Media scare about calcium supplements too alarmist

A recent feature in a UK national paper ran this headline:

Women who take calcium supplements 'increase risk of heart attack by up to 30%'

This is a typical example of sensationalist, scaremongering journalism and was based on a paper published in the British Medical Journal that made a similar but not quite so sensational claim. In fact, the study that appeared in the BMJ was a review of other studies into calcium supplementation and possible links to cardiac problems.

Essentially, the press report did not make it expressly clear that the study was into calcium supplements *without coadministered vitamin D* (calcium by itself is not particularly effective or well absorbed without vitamin D) or that the increased risk in disease was thought, even by the authors of the study, to be modest.

Doubts about the research

Professor Chris Nordin of Royal Adelaide Hospital has refuted the study's conclusion saying:

"Men are much more liable to heart attacks than women but women need calcium far more than men, so it is absurd to publish a study of the effect of calcium on the heart without separating men from women."

Professor Nordin has been working on calcium metabolism and osteoporosis for more than 50 years. He drafted the World Health Organisation dietary calcium recommendations, which have been adopted in Australia. He queries the findings published recently in the British Medical Journal.

Professor Nordin believes calcium supplements are predominantly recommended for and used by postmenopausal women because their bone loss is due to an increase in bone breakdown, which responds to calcium (with vitamin D if necessary). But they are seldom recommended for elderly men because their bone loss has a different cause, which seldom needs calcium.

He is quoted as saying that the results of the survey were **not** statistically significant.

"Concluding that calcium supplements can lead to a 30 per cent increase in heart attack risk is quite **premature and alarmist** and can only set back the cause of osteoporosis prevention which should be our primary objective."

Professor Nordin says he would like to see all women have their bone density measured at menopause so that women with low to normal bone density can take

dietary and exercise measures to prevent osteoporosis developing.

As for calcium supplements, as the doctor responsible for setting current daily recommendations, he says 1,300mg for post-menopausal women is appropriate and could even be set a little higher.

People interested in calcium supplementation should consider Lifestream Natural Calcium which is produced from a certified organic sea vegetable called Lithothamnium calcareum and demonstrates advanced bioavailability of calcium and other important co-factor minerals including boron, magnesium, zinc, copper, iodine and sulphur Available in powder and vegicaps. For more details, go to Super Supplements, then Vitamins & Minerals or use the Search function.