

**THE HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS INFORMATION SERVICE (HSIS) COMMENTS ON
THE ROLE OF CALCIUM IN CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE**

15th January 2008 – A paper published this week in the British Medical Journal on line¹ reviews the usage of calcium supplementation in older women with reference to cardiovascular disease. As a result, Pamela Mason, nutritionist and spokesperson for HSIS notes the following with regards to this paper:

“This study has **several limitations**. Firstly, the study had a high drop out rate. Only 50% of the calcium supplemented group and 40% of the placebo group completed the five years of the study and this high drop out rate has to reduce confidence in the study results.

“Secondly, even if all the women had completed the study, it was a small study for what was being measured. Though 1471 women were recruited, this is actually a small number from which to measure the large number of cardiovascular endpoints included in the study (ie, heart attack, angina, chest pain, stroke, transient ischaemic attack, sudden death, and death as well as an endpoint combining three of the above, namely heart attack, stroke and sudden death).

“Thirdly, the calcium intake in this study of women, averaging 800mg/day, is above the UK RNI (Reference Nutrient Intake) for calcium, which is 700mg/day.”

Pamela continues: “In the UK, however, the most recent NDNS study in British adults found that 42% of adult women overall had calcium intakes below the RNI. Though the older women – ie, in the 50-64 age group - had higher calcium intakes than the younger groups of women, 36% of this older group still had calcium intakes below the RNI. Of key relevance to the BMJ study, which looked at older women, is the European SENECA study² which found that **one third of elderly women across 10 European countries had very low dietary calcium intakes, ie between 300 and 600mg daily.**

¹Bolland et al. Vascular events in healthy older women receiving calcium supplementation: randomized controlled trial. BMJ, Online First January 16, 2008, doi.10.1136/bmj.39440.525752.BE

²Gennari C. Calcium and vitamin D nutrition and bone disease of the elderly. Public Health Nutrition 2001; 4:547-559.

“What is also important to note is that previous studies have found benefits of calcium supplementation in protecting against cardiovascular disease. Calcium supplementation has been shown to reduce blood pressure³. In addition, calcium supplementation has been shown to improve the cholesterol profile, - ie the ratio of HDL to LDL cholesterol - by 20% in postmenopausal women⁴, a change associated with 20-30% reduction in cardiovascular events⁵. Given all these factors, it is too early to conclude that calcium supplementation has adverse effects on cardiovascular health. This certainly is a case of more research needed.”

Pamela concludes: **“Calcium is an essential mineral, vital for bone health and nerve and muscle function. The results of this study certainly do not suggest that people should lower their calcium intakes below the RDA (Recommended Daily Amount). Indeed, because of the importance of calcium it remains imperative for people to achieve the RDA. Given that significant numbers of the UK population are not achieving this through their diet, a calcium supplement is beneficial.”**

-ENDS-

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³ Am J Hypertens 1999;12:84-92

⁴ Am J Med 2002;112:343-7.

⁵ New Engl J Med 1995;333:301-7.