

## Leading Health Experts Find Common Myths May Be Barriers To Better Health For African American Women

### ***Bone Health Paramount For Good Health***

(NAPSA)—Laila Ali joined a prominent panel of experts recently to explore the unique health concerns of African American women and offered new strategies for combating significant health issues facing this group. One simple solution from the panel—including lowfat or fat free milk in the daily diet.

“Several recent studies have pointed to a link between low milk consumption and higher incidences of low bone mass, hypertension and obesity,” said Ramona Tascoe, MD, chair of the Women’s Health Section for the National Medical Association. “Because of fears about lactose intolerance, many African American women have totally eliminated milk from their diet, which could lead to serious long-term health consequences.”

Even the estimated 25 percent of Americans having trouble digesting lactose can enjoy milk, according to panel member Barbara Dixon, RD, author of *Good Health for African Americans*. Dixon recommends lactose-reduced or lactose-free milk. “It has all the nutrients of regular milk,” Dixon says. “The only difference is the lactase enzyme has been added to the milk, breaking down the lactose before you drink it.”

Dixon also recommends drinking milk in smaller portions and with meals, instead of on an empty stomach. Solid foods slow down the digestive process and allow the body more time to digest the lactose, which helps decrease or eliminate symptoms.

“It has almost become culturally acceptable to avoid dairy foods, but we’re missing out on



important nutrients associated with disease prevention and good health,” Dixon said. “Dairy products are among the most convenient and concentrated sources of calcium. We need to take away the fear factor and educate African American women about the myths and realities of lactose intolerance, and the vital role dairy products play in a healthy diet.”

#### **Low Calcium Consequences**

Unfortunately, the average African American woman gets only about half of the recommended amount of calcium she needs each day. “If she’s cutting out dairy products because of lactose intolerance, it’s difficult to get enough calcium from other foods,” said panel member Jeanette Keith, MD, assistant professor of clinical medicine in the department of gastroenterology/nutrition at the University of Chicago Hospitals. Three-fourths of the calcium in the U.S. diet comes from milk and milk products.

Too little calcium in the diet can reduce bone growth, which can lead to osteoporosis later in life. While African American women tend to have stronger, denser bones compared to Caucasians, they are not immune to osteoporosis.