



spotlight on health

Calcium Is Key For Optimal Fitness

by Dr. Michele Cyr

(NAPSA)—A few simple changes can transform your diet into one that promotes low body fat and provides the nutritional requirements for a more active lifestyle. The key can be summed up in one word: calcium.

A silent danger for women is low bone mass. A recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, shows that the prevalence of osteopenia, a preliminary form of osteoporosis, is much higher than previously believed, affecting nearly 40 percent of postmenopausal women.

Osteopenia and osteoporosis are defined by decreasing bone mass. Bones are made primarily of calcium, a mineral that is found in many of the foods we eat.

In our early years, when bones are growing, we need to consume high levels of calcium to build bone mass. This need levels off in middle years, but increases again after 40 when our bones begin to lose calcium more quickly.

A number of studies have demonstrated that people who consume a high-calcium diet have a lower body fat index than those who don't. Although it is unclear why this happens, it is another reason that a high calcium diet is ideal for a diet and exercise regimen.

My best advice for boosting calcium is not to rely on dietary supplements, but to start with healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole-grain breads and lowfat yogurt.

The recommended dietary allowance of calcium for most adults is 1,000 milligrams (mg) per day, and 1,200 mg per day for postmenopausal women.

Unfortunately, studies have shown that the average American woman consumes only 600 mg per



Yogurt parfait with fresh fruit: a delicious source of calcium.

day. By adding a few servings of high-calcium foods, most people can reach and even surpass these goals.

Perhaps the best source of calcium is lowfat yogurt. Not only does a single cup of yogurt offer 40 percent of the recommended daily allowance of calcium, but it is a good source of protein, a nutrient that is vital in maintaining good health.

Yogurt also contains live and active cultures, beneficial organisms that aide in digestion and may even help to strengthen the immune system.

One of the best features of yogurt is the versatility and ease with which it can be incorporated into your diet. Be it by the cup, or as an ingredient in delicious dishes, yogurt can help you increase your calcium intake and achieve your fitness goals.

For more information about yogurt, including easy recipes, go to www.aboutyogurt.com.

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