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African-Americans need to up calcium intake

12/8/2004 - **The majority of African-Americans should be increasing their intake of calcium in order to reduce the risk of contracting a number of serious diseases according to a study published this week.**

A huge 89 percent of African Americans are not consuming the daily recommended amount of calcium, says the National Medical Association (NMA) in a consensus report on dairy nutrients published in the [Journal of the National Medical Association](#).

The report suggests that African Americans should include three to four servings of low-fat dairy products daily to reduce the risk of conditions and diseases such as high blood pressure, obesity, stroke and colon cancer, which disproportionately affect this population.

"New information shows a clear, beneficial relationship between a healthy diet with three to four daily servings of lowfat dairy products and the reduction of obesity and hypertension, as well as risk reduction for several diseases that affect African Americans, including heart disease and colon cancer," said Winston Price, president of the NMA.

The vast majority of African Americans get only about half of the daily recommended amount of calcium and only half eat one or more servings of dairy a day. Of particular concern, 83 percent of African-American children (aged 2-17) are not getting enough calcium, according to the report.

The researchers have also included unpublished data from the African American Lactose Intolerance Understanding Study (AALIUS) that suggests fewer African-Americans are lactose intolerant than generally believed and this is therefore not a reason for them to avoid dairy products.

Data from the AALIUS shows that more than 75 percent of African Americans do not consider themselves to be lactose intolerant, and that 85 percent said if they knew they could avoid symptoms, they would add more milk and dairy products to their diets.

"Concerns about lactose intolerance often prevent African Americans from eating dairy products, however the good news is that lactose intolerance doesn't mean dairy intolerance," said Wilma Wooten, chair of the NMA consensus committee regarding this issue.

The study found, moreover, that African-American children, especially those between ages 2 and 12, drink milk less often with their meals compared to the rest of the population under 18 years old. Data showed, however, that when milk is offered at lunches outside the home - primarily in schools - African-American children enjoy it at levels comparable to the balance of the population.

"At home, parents have a great opportunity to be positive role models and reverse the trend of low calcium intake among African-American kids, as parents who drink milk have kids who drink milk," said Jeanette Newton Keith, assistant professor of medicine from the University of Chicago.

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