

African American Youth are Coming Up Short on Calcium National Medical Association Kicks Off Campaign to Help Battle Future Bone Disease

NASHVILLE, TN (August 7, 2001) – African American teenagers aren't really thinking about their bones, but the National Medical Association (NMA) thinks that they should. The NMA, the professional organization of African American physicians, is launching a new calcium education campaign at their annual meeting this week to get adolescents clued into the importance of calcium-rich foods, like milk.

"The National Medical Association is making it a top priority to address the lack of calcium in African American kids' and teens' diets," says Ramona Tascoe, M.D., chair of the Women's Health Section for the NMA. "The teen years are crucial bone building years when the calcium and vitamin D in milk is critical yet often missed because of the increased consumption of soda and juice drinks as well as misinformation about lactose intolerance."

To help prevent future fractures among African Americans, the NMA will be providing to their members a new calcium patient education kit including a youth-focused tearpad highlighting the importance of calcium with facts debunking the myths about lactose intolerance.

"Misinformation about lactose intolerance can lead people to unnecessarily cut dairy from the diet," says Jeanette Newton Keith, M.D., assistant professor of clinical medicine in the department of gastroenterology/nutrition at the University of Chicago. "Yet, milk provides calcium plus eight other essential nutrients and without milk it is very difficult to consume adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D."

Kids and Teen Calcium and Milk Consumption

Ninety-five percent of African American teen girls and seventy-seven percent of African American teen boys don't get the bone-building calcium that their growing bodies need, according to data from the United States Department of Agriculture. African American teens drink less milk than their Caucasian peers and their calcium intake is significantly lower. The data is particularly troubling regarding African American young girls (ages 12-19) who on average drink less than one glass of milk a day and only get half the 1,300 mg of calcium that they need daily.

Leading health researchers say that calcium from dairy is key to osteoporosis prevention. "Research shows that minority women are at a much greater risk for developing osteoporosis than previously believed. Doctors and parents need to help kids and teens focus on preventing this disease by incorporating milk and other milk products into the daily eating plan," says Dr. Keith.

Tips For Tolerance

Even people with lactose intolerance can still enjoy milk and Milk Group foods. The NMA recommends the following tips to gradually add dairy foods to the diet to help get the three to four daily servings that growing bodies need.

- Drink milk in small portions throughout the day with meals. Most people can comfortably enjoy an eight-ounce glass of milk.
- Look for lactose-reduced or lactose-free milk in the dairy case at your store.
- Enjoy aged hard cheeses, such as Cheddar, Colby, Swiss and Parmesan, which are naturally low in lactose and easy to enjoy.
- Make yogurt part of your daily meal plan. Live, active cultures in yogurt help digest the lactose for you.
- Turn any carton of milk into lactose-reduced milk by just adding a few drops of the lactase enzyme that you can find at most pharmacies. Or, look for lactase enzyme caplets at your drug store.
- Check with your doctor for diagnosis of lactose intolerance and be sure to follow their advice.