

# Should postmenopausal women take calcium supplements?

By ACSH Staff — March 17, 2015



Adequate calcium consumption is vital for bone health, and

plays an important role in preventing fractures and protecting against osteoporosis. For this reason, postmenopausal women are instructed to include plenty of calcium in their diets. Because women may not be getting the recommended calcium from their diets alone, they may rely on a calcium supplement.

Well, [according to Dr. Orli R. Etingin](#) <sup>[1]</sup>, director of the Iris Cantor Women's Health Center at New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center, Several large, credible studies have reported a higher incidence of heart attacks in both men and women who take calcium supplements. We have covered a few of these studies in the past. A large meta-analysis in 2011 published in *BMJ* involved measuring the incidence of heart attacks and stroke in 29,000 participants; [their results showed](#) <sup>[2]</sup> that for every 1,000 women who take calcium supplements for five years, six extra cases of heart attack occur while only three fractures are prevented. Overall, the data show an increased heart attack risk of 25 percent and a 15 percent increased risk for stroke. Another study in 2012 [published in the journal \*Heart\*](#) <sup>[3]</sup> followed 24,000 men and women for 11 years and found that taking calcium supplements was associated with an 86 percent increased risk of having a heart attack. This increased risk was not seen with dietary calcium.

Dr. Etingin points out that it is not clear how a calcium supplement might work to promote heart attacks. Some think that calcium is deposited in blood vessels resulting in calcified atherosclerotic plaque, but Etingin says that is not the case. She also points out that the majority of the studies conducted have looked at men and women over 50 who have the highest risk of a cardiovascular event and therefore, it is not clear if this association applies to younger individuals.

ACSH's Ariel Savransky adds, It is important that women, especially postmenopausal women, get enough calcium each day from calcium rich foods such as cheese, milk or yogurt. Some products, such as orange juice, are fortified with calcium and it can be found in a variety of green vegetables as well.

However, as Dr. Gil Ross [has said in the past](#) <sup>[2]</sup> when discussing results of such studies looking at

calcium supplements and cardiac problems, If a patient has serious risk factors for heart disease, I would take this into consideration when determining whether or not she really needs calcium. However, I wouldn't automatically take women off calcium supplements because of this study.

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[1] [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/science/17qna.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/science/17qna.html?_r=0)

[2] <http://acsh.org/2011/04/taken-to-heart-calcium-supplements-may-lead-to-cardiac-problems/>

[3] <http://acsh.org/2012/05/reassessing-latest-calcium-supplement-study/>