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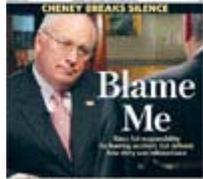
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## Health/Science

### Study: Calcium supplements no help

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Taking calcium and vitamin D supplements only slightly decreased the risk of hip fractures, had no effect on protecting bones elsewhere in the body and was useless in lowering the risk of colorectal cancer, studies of postmenopausal women have found.

In two reports from the Women's Health Initiative, scientists dispelled long-held beliefs about the benefits of calcium and vitamin D supplementation, despite smaller studies that suggested otherwise. Osteoporosis is a major public health issue, affecting 10 million people, mostly women. Colorectal cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer incidence and death in women.



"This is definitely a surprise," said Dr. Sylvia Wassertheil-Smoller, a professor of preventive medicine at Albert



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Einstein College of Medicine and a clinical investigator in the initiative, a massive seven-year project in 40 centers nationwide. "We had hoped the evidence would be more definitive."

Today's results, reported in the New England Journal of Medicine, are the last in a series of government women's health studies that have totaled more than \$700 million. Last week, the dietary portion of the r medical community astir with findings that a low-fat diet is powerless against heart disease and cancer.

Just as clinicians had long sworn by low-fat dietary regimens, they also believed calcium and vitamin D preventatives.

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Clinicians routinely recommend the supplements to maintain bone health. Yet in the trial of 36,282 women in the ages of 50 and 79, there was only a 1 percent increase in hip bone density for those taking 1,000 mg calcium and 400 international units of vitamin D daily. Researchers also discovered a 17 percent increase in kidney stones among participants taking pills.

During the trial, 374 women taking supplements experienced hip fractures at a rate of 14 fractures per 10,000. For those on placebo, the rate was 16 per 10,000. Women 60 and older had better results, with a 21 percent decrease in hip fractures.

Researchers say women of all ages fared well when they followed the plan religiously. For them, there was a 17 percent decrease in hip fractures.

Dr. Dorothy Lane, who led a portion of the trial at Stony Brook University Hospital, where 4,000 Long Island women participated, said she stands by the supplements, despite the pills' failure to thwart spinal and wrist fractures.

"I think it would still be advisable to take the recommended amount of calcium to improve bone density and bone health," Lane said.

Dr. Elizabeth Nabel, director of the Women's Health Initiative, stressed the importance of obtaining calcium from foods. She said daily exposure to sunlight helps achieve adequate vitamin D levels. The nutrient forms from the sun when exposed to sun. Vitamin D increases calcium absorption.

Although a string of studies have suggested calcium can prevent colorectal cancer, there was no difference in the number of invasive tumors between those taking supplements and those on a placebo.

Dr. Jean Wactawski-Wende of the University of Buffalo, who led the research, said it's possible the study was not long enough. "Colorectal cancer takes 10 to 20 years to develop. Seven years of supplementation and follow-up is not enough time to show a benefit."

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