



3-A-Day plan aims to boost calcium intake

Do you feel overwhelmed by too many conflicting nutrition messages, a multitude of pyramids and a glut of "cure-all" product promotions? It is quite a challenge to determine what really makes sense.

Well, get ready for a new message. On Monday, the American Dairy Association and the National Dairy Council kick off their "3-A-Day" promotion. Their goal is to give Americans the simple message to aim for three servings a day of high-calcium dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt.

Question: Why another message? What's the rationale?

Answer: Since 90 percent of teenage and adult women and 70 percent of teenage and adult men in the United States don't meet their recommended daily calcium intake, the program could make a difference in long-term bone health. Milk also is a good source of other nutrients that may be lacking in some people's diets. These

include potassium, phosphorus, protein, vitamins A, D, B-12, riboflavin and niacin.

Q: Is the 3-A-Day program related to the 5-A-Day (fruits and vegetables) program?

A: The two are only related in concept. Promoters of 3-A-Day hope the two similar and simple messages complement each other and make a greater difference than each could make by itself.

Q: Do people really need three servings of milk products every day?

A: The USDA pyramid recommends two to three servings, depending on age. For most people, aiming for 3-A-Day means they will likely get at least two servings. A 3-A-Day plan that includes 1 cup of milk, 1-1/2 ounces of cheese and a cup of yogurt would provide 900 to 1,000 mg of calcium, a good amount for young- to middle-aged adults. Teenagers need more (1,300 mg), as do older adults (1,200 mg).

Q: What if a person "doesn't do" dairy?

A: Although non-dairy foods may not provide all the nutrients found in milk, some foods provide the same amount of absorbable calcium as a 1-cup serving of milk: cooked vegetables such as bok choy (1-1/4 cups), broccoli (2-1/4 cups), choy sum (1/2 cup), kai choy (about 1 cup) and kale (1-1/2 cups); calcium-fortified orange juice (3/4 cup); soy milk (varies, but about 1 cup) and cereals (varies).

Some foods often recommended as calcium sources don't make it due to poor calcium absorption. For example, an adult would need about 3,000 calories worth of almonds, 6,000 calories of kidney beans, or 25 cups of cooked spinach to absorb enough calcium for daily needs.

To get the whole story on the 3-A-Day program, check out www.3aday.org

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