

## **Calcium Intake When You Cannot Consume Dairy**

Many people are unable to consume dairy for multiple reasons and may not be getting the calcium that their body requires to function adequately. Some may be lactose intolerant or some may have a milk protein allergy. Some may simply choose not to eat or drink mammalian by-products. Then there are those people who don't even know they have a problem with dairy products until it hits them out of the blue. Their initial symptom may be anaphylaxis. This can be the case with Alpha-gal Syndrome or AGS. There is definitely a rise in the number of Alpha-gal Syndrome cases. AGS arises from a tick bite and a lot of people refer to it as the "red meat allergy". Unfortunately, it goes way beyond just meat for most people. Some with AGS are unable to ingest, touch, or even breathe fumes from any mammalian by-products. With that being said, it is very important to find other sources of calcium.

Most people know that calcium is important for strong bones and teeth, but calcium is also essential for critical bodily functions such as muscle contraction (don't forget the heart is a muscle), the sending and receiving of nerve signals, hormone secretion, and blood clotting. Taking supplements is one way to be sure to get your calcium. Another is by eating leafy green vegetables like collard and turnip greens, bok choy, and kale. Yet another source of calcium is fish with soft bones such as salmon and sardines. Some foods may be calcium fortified. These include cereals, plant milks (soy, oat or nut), tofu, and fruit juices.

Too much calcium intake can be a bad thing if you have pre-existing conditions such as hypercalcemia, calcium kidney stones, and are prone to constipation. It is always best to discuss your calcium needs with your doctor. The recommended dose of calcium for an adult is 1,000 to 1,200 mg per day and should not exceed 2,500 mg. Infants range from 200 mg to 260 mg daily. From ages 1 to 3, the calcium intake increases from 500 to 700 mg daily, and from the age of 4 to 8 it is between 800 to 1,000 mg daily. Children between the ages of 9 to 18 should take in about 1,300 mg of calcium daily.

WIC is a supplemental nutrition program available to eligible pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, infants and children to age 5 years. WIC offers healthy food options, from whole grains to fruits and vegetables, healthy cereals, eggs, milk, cheese, yogurt, legumes, peanut butter and fish. WIC also educates on proper portions per age, the importance of water intake, limiting snack foods in favor of healthy options, and active play time.

For more information, call the Meigs County Health Dept. WIC Office at 740-992-0392.

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