

The Importance of Calcium & Collagen in the Body

Calcium and collagen are vital to the body throughout life. Calcium is essential in helping to build and strengthen bones. According to the Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements, approximately 99 percent of the calcium in the body can be found in the bones and the teeth. The other one percent aids the body's vital functions, such as maintaining a regular heartbeat and transmitting electrical impulses that are important for muscle contraction. The body cannot produce calcium on its own, so it must be obtained from other sources such as foods high in calcium or a supplement.

Strong bone development early in life may help young people avoid bone and joint problems later in life. According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), peak skeletal growth occurs during tween and teen years. By the time teens finish their growth spurt around the age of 17, 90 percent of their bone mass is established.

Calcium can even have an effect during pregnancy. A 2010 study published in *The Journal of Nutrition* indicated that a woman who is calcium-deficient during her pregnancy can have effects on cardiovascular development of the fetus and increase the risk of high blood pressure in the newborn. The study also linked maternal calcium deficiency to a risk of increased body fat percentage, elevated triglycerides and insulin resistance in children.

Researchers have identified 19 different types of a collagen that the body utilizes, with collagen type II being the most abundant in the body. Collagen aids in fortifying the cartilage and tendons and protecting them from damage. Further, the cartilage between the joints is mostly made up of collagen, which cushions the joints as the body moves. Collagen is also a major factor in the health of the skin. Approximately 75 percent of the skin is composed of collagen, which helps support the firmness of the skin. As we age, the body produces less collagen skin begins to lose its elasticity resulting in sagging skin, fine lines and wrinkles.

As the body ages, bone and joint issues become more prevalent. In fact, according to 2007-09 data from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), an estimated 50 million (22 percent) adults in the U.S. reported that they have some form of arthritis, as diagnosed by their doctor. Additionally, data from the 2003 NHIS estimated that by 2030, 67 million Americans (25 percent) ages 18 and older will have doctor-diagnosed arthritis. In addition to aging, other factors include sports injury, obesity and muscle weakness.

Osteoarthritis (OA), the most common form of arthritis, affects approximately 33 million Americans. While once thought to be due simply to wear and tear on the cartilage of a joint, the condition is now known to be a complex process that involves an active disease process. While it is much more common for seniors to suffer from some form of arthritis, children are not immune from the problem. In fact, the 2001-04 National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey reported that approximately 294,000 children under the age of 18 (approximately one in every 250 children) in the U.S. have some form of arthritis or rheumatic condition.

Osteoporosis can occur simultaneously with OA. And although osteoporosis is most commonly associated with women, anyone is susceptible to it. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF), 44 million (55 percent) of Americans age 50 and older have low bone density or osteoporosis. Women account for 80 percent of that number, while 20 percent of men have osteoporosis. NOF estimates that by 2020, half of all Americans over the age of 50 are expected to have low bone density or osteoporosis.

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