



Bayside Medical Group, Inc.

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BONE BANK

Contributing to Your “Bone Bank”

I always thought that when my mother said, “Drink your milk! It’s good for you!” that it was just something that mothers say. Well, it turns out she was right. Drinking skim milk, and taking calcium in other forms (like Tums) between the ages of 8 and 28, is very important. So is getting enough weight-bearing exercise. Here’s why:

The strength of our skeletons depends on how we contribute calcium to our “bone bank.” According to the genes we have inherited, 60% of our contribution isn’t under our control, our bodies just “do it.” But 40% of our bone strength depends on our own actions.

Our most important action is taking in enough calcium between the ages of 8 and 28 and especially between 12 and 16. That’s when our bodies lay down calcium in the bones, and most of that activity is in the teenage years. During those years we need to eat and drink a lot of calcium—1,000 mg a day as a preteen, and 1,500 mg a day as a teenager. An eight ounce glass of milk gives us 300 mg, so if we were to get our full dose of calcium from milk, we would have to drink five glasses of skim milk a day! (Skim to avoid the fat

that causes heart disease). That’s a lot of milk. Other foods have calcium, too—orange juice, meats and green leafy vegetables for example, but milk has the most.

Obviously, getting enough calcium just by eating is hard, so, we recommend that all teenagers take two Ultra Tums a day, after a meal, which contributes 1000 mg of elemental calcium. (Read the label to be sure.)

The second action to take is to indulge steadily in weight-bearing exercise, like running or lifting weights. For those who like to swim, you’ll have to augment your exercise program with a weight-bearing activity as bones form actively according to how they are stressed.

Finally, for all of you who think you weigh too much, there is an upside: heavy people develop the strongest bones. If you are thin, you have to be sure to take your Tums.

What is the payoff from taking calcium and exercising? Strong bones. We have all known older people who have broken their hips or collapsed their vertebrae, and even younger people who tend to break bones. Exercise and drink your milk while you are a teenager, and you won’t be one of them. But do it now, because the bone bank doesn’t take deposits when you are older!

