Leg Cramps, Dry Cough, and More

What if I told you that calcium is a powerhouse nutrient that has incredible effectiveness OUTSIDE the bones? Yes, 99% of our calcium is used to maintain the healthy growth and density of bones and teeth. But what about that other 1% of calcium – what does it do?

A specific type of calcium, especially when given with quality magnesium, has tremendous impact on muscle strength and endurance, steadies heart rhythm (which helps prevent heart attacks), reduces or even eliminates PMS, cures cold sores and fever blisters, takes care of muscle cramps, relieves restless leg syndrome, and can even get rid of chronic, dry coughs. I have recommended this unique type of calcium for many years, and it definitely works on problems both big and small, so I chose it as the subject of this Terry Talks Nutrition®

Calcium – Outside the Bones

The special form of calcium I recommend for issues OUTSIDE of bone health is calcium lactate. Calcium is undeniably important and essential for building bones, but the rest of the body—the “soft tissue”—needs calcium, too.

Calcium is important to our muscles because it plays a key role in the way our muscles flex and contract. This is why it is so valuable to athletes or anyone who is physically active.

When calcium is released into the muscles, as it is during exercise, it serves as a signal for them to contract and work. After the exercise or physical labor is done, the muscles signal a return to a relaxed state. Calcium goes back to being on “stand by”. However, if you’ve used up your stores of calcium during exercise, your muscles will be unable to respond quickly and effectively. Plus, they won’t relax properly, and you’ll probably get muscle cramps and the characteristic “twitching” at night. Calcium lactate has been recommended for over 50 years to relieve nighttime leg cramps and reduce muscle twitching.

In a clinical study of trained male and female cyclists taking either calcium lactate or placebo (no treatment), calcium lactate increased blood bicarbonate levels (the amount of carbon dioxide in the blood as it is transported to the lungs to be expelled), making the exchange of oxygen to muscle tissue more efficient. Not surprisingly, it also increased athletic performance – significantly. The time to exhaustion and total work increased 17% compared to the placebo group.

I’d also recommend calcium lactate for anyone who deals with restless leg syndrome (RLS). If you’ve noticed an aching or tingling in your legs – especially when you try to get to sleep at night – calcium lactate is an absolute must. Of course, RLS can happen when you’re just trying to sit still at work, too. Either way, calcium lactate will help leg muscles relax properly, so you can focus on getting your work done, or just getting a good night’s sleep.

Additionally, calcium has been shown to reduce symptoms of premenstrual syndrome – in some cases, lowering the severity by 48% overall. For the aches and pains associated with PMS, the individuals using calcium reported a 54% decrease in symptoms compared to a 15% increase for those using a placebo.

Calcium Lactate, Viral Infections and Dry Coughs

Have you noticed you often get a fever blister or a cold sore just before a big event? (It almost always seems to happen to a bride right before her wedding day.) That’s because stress causes damage to the cells in your body and weakens your immune defenses. This is important when you’re dealing with viral intruders that use the cells to replicate. In the same way that having a good, solid foundation for your home helps it weather storms, strong cells repel viruses. Calcium lactate – along with magnesium – helps fight both virus-caused irritations like...
fever blisters, and non-viral compromises to respiratory health, too.

Children often get a dry, hacking cough after a full day of playing outside in the sun due to the depletion of calcium from the soft tissues. The free-radical damage and energy expended conspire to set up the perfect situation for a dry, hacking cough that has nothing to do with a cold or virus, but has everything to do with simply exhausting the body’s resistance to bronchial irritations.

Calcium lactate helps replenish the calcium in the soft tissues while magnesium helps relax muscles – keeping spasmodic coughs at bay.

**Magnesium – A Magnificent Mineral**

Magnesium is one of the minerals we need for everything: cellular energy, metabolism, muscle strength, heart health, and, of course, our natural immune defenses. A deficiency of magnesium can lead to numbness and tingling, muscle contractions and cramps, hypertension, and in severe cases, abnormal heart rhythms.

Magnesium has been found to enhance physical performance across the board, as well as help the muscles in the body relax following exercise. That means you don’t get that “tightness” from exercise or regular, repeated physical activity like you might be required to do for work. It also reduces oxidative stress and inflammation – the two primary causes of all disease. Magnesium is excellent at relieving pain, too. It does this by blocking a pain receptor called the NMDA receptor. It’s great to have on board after a workout (or to take preemptively before one) to keep your muscles from tightening up.

Our bodies tend to burn through minerals at a very fast rate when we are physically active – so these minerals aren’t going to build up in the body as you might imagine. In fact, one study with ultra-endurance athletes showed that individuals in the study – and by extension anyone participating in heavy activity – were very likely to be deficient in magnesium as well as zinc, one of the other critical minerals in this formula.

In this case, even though the participants’ nutrient intake was generally adequate, these minerals – magnesium and zinc – were a problem, especially for male athletes.

Other studies on the effects of magnesium have found that it helps people suffering from headaches and premenstrual syndrome, too, so aside from its effects on physical endurance, it is simply an excellent nutrient to partner with calcium lactate.

**Zinc – for Muscles and More**

Generally, if a person is deficient in one mineral, they are deficient in many of them. Zinc is no exception.

Zinc helps the body heal muscles, tendons, and ligaments in the event of small tears that often happen when we’re active. Without adequate zinc, however, these tears can keep you from being active again. In models of wounds or tissue stress, zinc concentrations at the injured site peak after a few days, usually around the time you notice the strain the most.

Zinc deficiency reduces blood glutathione levels. Glutathione is a natural antioxidant produced by the body that protects our cells from oxidative damage, which can be heavy during times of intense exercise, when the muscles require oxygen-rich red blood cells.

Zinc is a required nutrient for T-lymphocyte (white blood cell) activity. It helps our body’s natural “guards” keep out potentially dangerous invaders, including bacterial and viral infections. It is what is known as an “immunomodulator”, which means it assists the immune system when the situation demands it, but otherwise simply helps us stay healthy.

Because zinc gluconate is not bound to partner with calcium designed for use OUTSIDE the bones! It helps keep our muscles moving, and our immune system running smoothly. Magnesium – so often cited for heart health benefits, is a must for muscle relaxation, free-radical protection, and respiratory health. And zinc, often listed last, but never the least of these, is critical for muscle and immune health – and those are just two of its many roles!

Look for calcium lactate with magnesium citrate in a 5 to 1 ratio for proper absorption, along with zinc gluconate. It can help you avoid the aches and pains that keep you from getting good sleep at night, stop restless leg syndrome, shore up your body’s immune defenses so that stress doesn’t catch you off-guard, and help your children stay healthy after a long day of outside play. It’s an incredibly effective standby that I’ve recommended for years, and I urge you to give it a try.

**Calcium Means More than Healthy Bones**

It’s important to remember that minerals – like all nutrients – have more than one function in the body. Calcium is certainly a prime example. By all means, I recommend taking a properly-formulated calcium, vitamin D, and mineral supplement for healthy bones. But beyond bone health, calcium plays a role in such a variety of body systems that it makes sense to also supplement with calcium designed for use outside the bones! It helps keep our muscles moving, and our immune system running smoothly. Magnesium – so often cited for heart health benefits, is a must for muscle relaxation, free-radical protection, and respiratory health. And zinc, often listed last, but never the least of these, is critical for muscle and immune health – and those are just two of its many roles!

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When in doubt, always consult your physician or health care practitioner. This column is to provide you with information to maintain your health.

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