

## Preventing Osteoporosis with Calcium Supplementation: Possible Psychological Hazards

Rick Malter, Ph.D.

[www.malterinstitute.org](http://www.malterinstitute.org)

[rickmind@cableone.net](mailto:rickmind@cableone.net)

© 2003

During the past several years, increased media attention has been focused on the problem of osteoporosis in older women and on the steps that may be taken to prevent this malady of middle and old age. Osteoporosis involves the loss of calcium from the bones, thus making them porous, brittle, and more susceptible to breaks and fractures. A great deal has been written about this health problem in the professional literature and in the news media.

Since this media blitz about women's need for calcium supplementation began, a number of cases have come to this writer's attention that suggest that, from a psychological perspective, some caution may need to be taken with calcium supplementation. It appears that some serious psychological problems may be linked to increased calcium supplementation in certain women. Some of the adverse reactions reported include: increased fatigue and exhaustion, depression, anxiety and panic attacks, paranoid feelings, memory and concentration problems, headaches, and insomnia. Some women report a feeling like being in a fog.

Cessation of calcium supplementation alleviates some of these reactions and will often prevent the individual from feeling worse. When a totally different supplementation program is introduced, it leads to: a reversal of the symptoms, increased energy and awareness, and a vast improvement in psychological functioning.

What could account for such a phenomenon that appears to run counter to the theory underlying calcium supplementation for the stated purpose of "preventing" osteoporosis in later years? In his book, *Nutrition and Your Mind*, Dr. George Watson of USC reported clinical case studies of adverse psychological reactions that appeared to be directly related to an individual's nutritional status. These individuals responded very well to carefully selected food supplements and diet change. There was no psychological "meaning" to the behavioral and emotional aberrations that these individuals experienced. The aberrations cleared up in direct response to nutritional intervention without traditional psychotherapy or counseling.

An important finding of Dr. Watson's work is that a person's metabolic or "oxidation" type dictated the kind of food supplements and diet which were best suited to that individual's needs at that point in time. Watson identified two different oxidation types. One is the fast oxidizer, and the other is the slow oxidizer. Their diet and food supplement needs are exactly the opposite. What worked well with the slow oxidizer was disastrous for the fast oxidizer. What worked well for the fast oxidizer was disastrous for the slow oxidizer.

Watson's research and clinical observations suggest that the general recommendation for increased calcium supplementation in all women may need to be considered with much greater caution. This more cautious approach is related to Watson's concept of oxidation type and the different food supplement needs of fast and slow oxidizers. With this conceptual framework, one would expect that calcium

supplementation will work well for some individuals and will result in significant problems for others. Empirically, we are beginning to see individual cases illustrating these relationships.

A refinement of Watson's work was achieved by the late Dr. Paul Eck, Director of Analytical Research Labs in Phoenix, Arizona and by Dr. David Watts, Director of Trace Elements, Inc. of Dallas, Texas. Drs. Eck and Watts have shown that oxidation types can be easily identified by the relationships between essential nutrient macro-minerals in a hair analysis. Furthermore, they have shown that the same interaction between nutritional supplements and oxidation type occurs when the hair mineral analysis is used to determine oxidation type as occurs when Dr. Watson's blood analysis was used. The advantage of the hair mineral analysis is that greater refinements in the selection of nutritional supplements can be made than when blood analysis is used. For example, the hair mineral analysis can indicate when zinc supplementation is likely to benefit the individual and when zinc is likely to increase fatigue and exhaustion by suppressing adrenal functions.

As a general principle, increased calcium supplementation is likely to benefit the fast oxidizer, but cause psychological problems for the slow oxidizer. However, under certain conditions, calcium supplementation may temporarily be of benefit to some slow oxidizers, but not over an extensive period of time. These conditions are: (1) a low calcium/magnesium ratio and/or (2) an inversion of the ratio of sodium/potassium.

Since there is a very large proportion of women who are slow oxidizers (estimated at 80 to 90%), the concept of oxidation type and the different diet and supplement needs of each type suggests that the theory underlying the "prevention" of osteoporosis with calcium supplementation is quite limited to only a very small proportion of women. On the other hand, this theory may lead to substantial mental health problems for large numbers of women who are slow oxidizers. These women may need an entirely different approach to "preventing" osteoporosis in future years if it is at the expense of their present psychological well-being.

It is extremely important that mental health practitioners -- psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc. -- become aware that the presenting psychological problems in many women may be triggered or exacerbated by calcium supplementation. This is even more important when the woman is on the birth control pill or is taking estrogen as hormone replacement therapy since estrogen raises calcium levels in the cells and tissues. A heightened awareness of these factors can have a profound effect on the professional's understanding of the impact of nutritional supplementation on psychological functioning. This would lead to much more appropriate and effective nutritional treatment of these women.

Below is the hair mineral analysis profile that is the most common mineral pattern among women. This is the mineral pattern of the slow oxidizer for whom calcium supplementation is likely to worsen the osteoporosis trend and exacerbate both physical and psychological problems. The next mineral profile is the fast oxidizer who is likely to benefit greatly from calcium supplementation. Both of these mineral patterns reflect osteoporosis trends, but for different glandular and metabolic reasons. Therefore, different approaches are needed for each oxidation type.



