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Magnesium crucial for overall health - bones, teeth, muscle health

Stephen Langer

Magnesium Crucial For Overall Health

Magnesium helps to assure strong bones and teeth, and maintains muscle health.

With today's accent on calcium for the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis, to lower high blood pressure and to keep muscles operating properly, few people realize that magnesium is needed for the same reasons.

In the process of trying to get sufficient amounts of calcium, they ignore their intake of magnesium.

Like calcium, magnesium also helps to assure strong bones and teeth, lowers high blood pressure and maintains muscle health. While calcium is needed for muscle contraction, magnesium is required for muscle relaxation.

A balance of these two minerals -- usually two parts calcium to one part magnesium -- is necessary.

Several of my patients who suffered severe and repeated cramps corrected this condition by adding more magnesium to their diet.

Surveys consistently show that Americans short-change themselves in magnesium, along with other critically needed nutrients. Although the Recommended Dietary Allowance for magnesium is 400 mg, the typical American diet supplies between 200 and 350 mg daily.

I usually recommend to my patients a daily intake of one to two 200 mg tablets of magnesium chloride that is readily and efficiently absorbed in the alkaline environment of

the small intestine. Taking a magnesium supplement is safe for everyone except patients with kidney disease, because the kidneys compensate for excess uptake by increasing urinary excretion.

I also advise them to include one or more of the following magnesium-rich foods and supplements in their daily diet: sardines (which are also rich in calcium) egg yolk, almonds, sesame seeds, filberts, cheeses, kelp, brewer's yeast and torula yeast.

Although the most common cause of deficiency of magnesium is too little intake, sometimes shortages are caused by excess intake of alcohol and fiber, excessive loss of this mineral in the urine and poor intestinal absorption.

Excess intake of fiber can cause excessive magnesium loss, because phytates in fibers usher magnesium and calcium out of the body.

In addition, a high-fat diet can steal needed magnesium. When magnesium combines with fat, it forms a salt which the body cannot absorb. In my practice, I not only recommend that my patients take a magnesium supplement, but that they take a high lipase pancreatic enzyme to prevent such loss.

Heavy loss of magnesium in the urine can be a problem for diabetics, alcoholics and people taking diuretics for high blood pressure.

Poor intestinal absorption often results from intestinal surgery, severe diarrhea and prolonged use of anti-ulcer drugs that block the secretion of stomach acids.

An adequate intake and delivery of magnesium is a must, because an incredible number of body functions depend upon the healthy maintenance of the heart muscle, the ability of the arteries to dilate and the healthy function of the lungs, among numerous other things.

A host of conditions can result from too little magnesium in the diet: anorexia nervosa, mental confusion, vomiting, muscle irritability, tremors and seizures, vertigo, visual changes, depression, hallucinations and even psychoses.

The most serious complications from a deficiency of magnesium are heart conditions such as irregular heartbeat and rapid heartbeat. Frightening changes in EKG readings may be diagnosed by physicians untrained in nutrition as primary heart disease, rather than correctable magnesium depletion.

Magnesium deficiency enhances the effects of digitalis, a drug often used to treat congestive heart failure and can cause that drug to become toxic in normal therapeutic doses.

One of the most common heart valve disorders, ideopathic mitral valve prolapse, which affects about five percent of the population may, in many instances, be caused by magnesium deficiency.

Symptoms that usually accompany this condition are fatigue, panic attacks, palpitations, chest pain and hyperventilation.

A researcher in this field claims partial or complete remission of this ailment in one-third of all patients for a year with magnesium treatment.

Magnesium has scored major successes in lowering blood cholesterol and blood pressure in diuretic-treated patients with high blood pressure who showed clinical symptoms of magnesium deficiency, but whose blood levels of the mineral were not necessarily low.

Deficiency of magnesium is strongly implicated in the development of hardening of the heart arteries. Many studies show that serious heart disease is least prevalent in areas of hard drinking water, high in magnesium and calcium content.

Biopsies reveal that individuals who die from heart attacks have a lower magnesium content in their heart muscle than those without heart disease.

Now a biochemist finds that a magnesium deficiency may actually initiate heart attacks by producing spasm of the coronary arteries.

Several authorities have discovered that the aged are especially vulnerable to congestive heart failure, coronary thrombosis, and hypertension and high cholesterol levels when

deficient in magnesium, either due to low intake or to drug therapy that interferes with it.

Apart from cardiovascular complications, a deficiency of magnesium can contribute to or cause a host of medical ailments, including problems with the thymus, the key gland of the immune system which protects us from disease and degeneration.

A deficiency of magnesium in various animals caused the thymus gland to waste away, making the immune system less able to fight off disease.

A low intake of magnesium increases the output of certain hormones in stress -- corticosteroids and catecholamines -- that can be toxic to the system when produced in excess.

Such responses to stress may explain in part why the detoxification of acute alcoholics is improved by magnesium.

Of special interest to diabetics is the fact that during insulin treatment, neither magnesium nor potassium can be metabolized properly. So these essential minerals must be replaced. Some biochemists believe that a deficiency of magnesium may be part of the cause of insulin-resistant diabetes.

Magnesium deficiency may contribute to the development of asthma. In susceptible individuals, insufficient magnesium in cells of the respiratory tract can cause bronchospasm, increased mucous production and edema of mucous membranes, all of which are symptoms of asthma.

In some cases, an intravenous solution of magnesium has helped to abort an asthma attack by dilating the lung passages.

Magnesium, alone or in various combinations, is available at your health food store.

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