



calcium overkill

A new report into calcium intake shows that baby boomers may be getting too much of a good thing

BY DR. ART HISTER



notion that they should be doing more to prevent osteoporosis as they age. And one of the mainstays in osteoporosis prevention advice — along with the need to do more weight-bearing exercise — is to take calcium supplements, as well as extra vitamin D to help absorb the calcium.

So, baby boomers, a generation that believes fervently that if its members do all the right things, they will never die, are apparently taking lots

Trouble is that calcium can be harsh on the kidneys, and a recent report published in the *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology* warns about a large increase in the number of people being diagnosed with kidney damage from what used to be called milk-alkali syndrome. The lead author of this paper would like to rename it calcium-alkali syndrome, since it's actually the calcium in milk that accounts for the kidney damage.

The bottom line is that lots of people are now ingesting two or even three grams of extra calcium every day

of calcium supplements. In typical baby-boomer fashion, however, many are overdoing it. Although the recommended intake for calcium is roughly 1,200 to 1,500 mg a day, many people are apparently taking way more than that.

On top of this, a great number of people out there also suffer from GERD or stomach acid reflux, and they are self-treating their symptoms in part with antacids, many of which contain calcium.

So, the bottom line is that lots of people are now ingesting two or even three grams of extra calcium every day.

The researchers warn that some people are at special risk of this syndrome, especially pregnant women, people on dialysis, transplant recipients and (hey, you knew this was coming) baby boomers, or as the researchers call them, “menopausal” women.

Anyway, for all you Woodstock graduates (I was there!), it's time to recall that warning back in the first paragraph: Just because a little bit of something is good for us, a whole lot of it isn't necessarily better. Vitamin D, anyone? ■

Repeat after me: just because a little bit of something is good for you (sex, media exposure, religion, money), a lot isn't necessarily better (if you think money might be an exception to that rule and that too much money never hurts, I offer you two words: **Paris Hilton**).

Anyway, as someone who reads medical literature

several hours every day (yes, I know I should get out more), I'm reminded of that lesson on nearly a daily basis. Although I could give you several recent examples, the one I want to focus on, because it affects so many people, is the intake of calcium supplements.

According to surveys, a large and growing number of baby boomers have bought into the widely promoted

Dr. Art Hister is a medical writer and health analyst for Global TV and Corus Radio.