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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, November 20, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Calcium in the Menu." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,  
U.S.D.A.

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The day of worrying, wondering and fussing about what foods to eat and what foods not to eat, I hope, will soon be over. The day of counting calories painfully, or of hunting vitamins expensively, or of worrying about the proper roughage and so on really should be on the wane. We've had a lot of unnecessary panics about our diet. The more the scientists learn about diet, the more they believe in that simple and comfortable and easy rule: Plenty of variety means safety. If you eat all different kinds of foods, if you keep away from whims and prejudices against foods, the chances are that you'll have the proper food substances to keep you well and healthy.

Of course, in certain special cases, you may need special foods. But I'm talking now about the general run of people who haven't any particular difficulty. For them, variety is the best diet rule I know of. The specialists say that when you make your menus, the best plan is to base your meals on the protective foods. That just means to start out with a foundation of milk and eggs, fruits and vegetables, and some meat or fish. Then, on that safe foundation, build your starches and sweets and fats or your other extras, according to your needs.

But once in a while a diet that seems to have a pretty good variety really is lacking in some special necessary substance. Quite often an otherwise satisfactory diet lacks iron, for example. And frequently meals for the family that seem all right really contain far too little calcium. That's why a check on the regular run of family menus is often a help to family health.

A diet that is lacking in calcium is especially hard on the children. Of course, everybody needs calcium. But we grown-ups only need enough for the upkeep of our bones and teeth, while children need it both for building and for upkeep. In general, children need just twice as much calcium as their elders, so their meals need adjusting to provide it.

The nutritionists tell me that bone and tooth tissues can develop and harden normally only when calcium and phosphorus are taken in good relative proportions in the diet and when certain of the vitamins are also present. Let's just review this matter of tooth-building while we're on the subject. The urgent need for phosphorus and calcium begins in every human being about seven months before birth, when the cells are increasing rapidly and when the bone structure and tooth buds begin to form.



This need increases during the last few weeks before birth, when the developing skeleton stores calcium at a rapid rate. By the time the child is born, all the crowns of his first teeth are formed in his gums and four of his permanent teeth are partly developed in his jaws. This large demand for calcium before the child is born and during his babyhood is one reason why the doctors and the nutritionists urge mothers themselves to take a quart of milk every day. Before the child's birth and while she is nursing her baby, the mother must provide for her own calcium needs at the same time she supplies her child with the material for strong bones and good teeth.

Perhaps you've heard that old and gloomy saying, passed down among women for many generations-- "A tooth for every child." Well, like many old sayings, this has a foundation in truth. Many women have failed to take in enough calcium for themselves and their children, so nature supplied the child first. When this happens it leaves the mother so depleted in calcium that her teeth are likely to soften or show decay soon after the child is born or while she is nursing him.

During all the growing years, teeth suffer from a diet low in calcium. Sometimes they show it by not developing properly. Sometimes they may not harden or calcify. Sometimes they develop cavities. Many observations made on children with poor teeth show that when their diet is changed to contain the proper supply of calcium, phosphorus and vitamins, cavities in their teeth that have started are checked and new ones don't develop. Milk is the most important food in these corrective diets.

Milk in every form is by far the most valuable source of calcium -- milk dried and condensed and evaporated and buttermilk; cheese (especially cottage cheese) and other milk products.

Now let's mention some of the other foods rich in calcium. Among the vegetables, greens of different sorts rank high -- beet greens, broccoli, chard, collards, dandelion greens, kale, mustard greens and turnip tops. Cauliflower also ranks high among the vegetables. Many other common vegetables like cabbage, carrots, turnips and parsnips also belong in the list of calcium foods. Clams rank high among sea foods.

The whole grain cereals also contain calcium. The outer coat is the source of most of the mineral matter in grains, as a comparison between white and whole wheat flour shows.

But no matter how carefully you may plan a diet, you'll find it very hard to get in a proper supply of calcium unless you include milk. The best allowance is a quart of milk a day for every child and each adult a pint.

Now let's plan an economy meal, generous in calcium, just as a sample of how it's done. Let's have veal chops with milk gravy. Then, a sweet relish of some kind. Mashed potatoes. Panned kale. A little milk is used in this recipe. Milk to drink. For dessert, Canned peaches with custard sauce. Please notice that the gravy, the potatoes, the kale and the custard sauce all contain some milk. Please notice also that the vegetable was kale, which is one of those greens richest in calcium.

Tomorrow: "Questions and Answers."

