

## Need Milk?

Is milk the best way to get calcium? A new report says it may not be

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ERIC MILLER—AP

“Drink your milk. It’s good for you!” You’ve probably heard that many times and it’s true. Milk contains calcium, which is a necessary nutrient for keeping bones and teeth healthy and strong. The U.S. government even requires milk as part of the National School Lunch Program, saying that students should drink one cup of fat-free or low-fat milk at each meal.

### Milk Report

Last Thursday, however, a group of doctors asked the government to remove milk from the lunch program. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) says, “Milk is high in sugar, high in fat and high in animal protein,” all of which have negative effects on health. The PCRM says there are better and healthier ways to get calcium such as eating beans, broccoli, cereals and tofu. Orange juice and soymilk that have

calcium added to them also supply the nutrient. “One of the only reasons people talk about dairy, or promote it at all, is because it is going to help build strong bones,” says Dr. Neal Barnard, president of the PCRM. But milk may not be the best way to get the calcium your body needs.

Of course, calcium is important for healthy bones and teeth, but there are other things that affect your bone strength, such as genes, how much vitamin D you take in and getting an hour’s worth of exercise every day.

### The Other Side

Some nutritionists disagree with the idea that milk isn’t important. Keri Gans, a dietitian, says, “I think it’s irresponsible to take this beverage that children enjoy, especially among those who are unable to meet their nutrient needs for the day, and remove it from the lunch line.”

The U.S. government is studying the request of the PCRM, but a decision may be a long way off. Meanwhile, Marion Nestle, a professor at New York University, puts it best: “Milk demonstrably has nutrients. Other foods have the same nutrients. It’s just a food. Like other foods, too much might be a problem.”

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