Dear Alice,

I've heard that your body uses calcium to deal with carbonation in carbonated beverages. I drink a lot of carbonated water so I'm curious if this is true. I want to know if I should take a calcium supplement or stop drinking carbonated water. Thanks.

? Fizzy Water Drinker

Answer

Dear Fizzy Water Drinker,

It’s no wonder you’re curious about the effect of carbonation on your body’s ability to use calcium. There’s a lot of speculation out there! Here are the facts: the carbonation (or “fizz”) in your water is caused by plain old carbon dioxide, and time and again, researchers have found that this fizziness alone does not pose risks to your bone health or the way your body interacts with calcium. In general, research shows that you should be able to sip carbonated water without any negative effects on bone health. Things do get a little more complicated, though, when we consider other types of carbonated beverages.

Where might all of the rumors about carbonation and calcium be coming from? Well, it turns out that drinking cola/soda/pop (whatever you choose to call it) has been associated with low bone mineral density in studies in women, teens, and in some animal studies. For example, for post-menopausal women, one study found an association between hip fractures and cola consumption. Findings like these may raise some red flags for the cola-lovers of the world. Fortunately, though, researchers are working on figuring out what exactly it is in cola that leads to these effects on bone density. These soda scientists think it’s possible that caffeine, sugar, or phosphorus in colas are ingredients that aren’t in carbonated water may contribute to bone density problems. However, the evidence for these factors is inconclusive. In the meantime, you can check out more information on what is currently known about soda’s effects on health. Stay tuned as researchers continue to learn more on this topic!

And what about the calcium supplements? While you probably don’t need to start taking them just because you’re into carbonated water, it’s never a bad idea to check in with your health care provider to be sure you’re meeting your personal nutrition needs. If you’d like to read up a bit on the topic first, you might try starting with Calcium, milk, and osteoporosis or consult the National Institutes of Health’s information on calcium supplements. In terms of getting calcium in your diet without supplements, dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yogurt are...
packed with calcium. Dark leafy green veggies and calcium-fortified juices are good choices, too.

It’s good you’re thinking about calcium, as it is certainly an essential player in your diet and in bone health. Now that you know more, you can feel good about grabbing for a refreshing glass of bubbly water to quench your thirst.

Alice!
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