

# **FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CALCIUM INTAKE OF UNDERGRADUATE FEMALES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES.**

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**Background:** Calcium is an essential mineral in the human body. An adult has about 1.2kg of calcium in the body. Approximately 99% of the body's calcium is located in the bones and teeth. The remaining one percent is found in the nerves, body fluids and muscle. Although calcium is a large component of bones, the most important functions of calcium are in the maintenance of muscle contractility and responses to hormones and neurotransmitters.

**Objective:** To determine if factors such as ethnicity, knowledge (of calcium) preference of milk and milk beverages and the symptoms experienced after drinking milk influenced calcium intake.

**Design:** One hundred females were randomly selected from the University of the West Indies, St Augustine campus to participated in the study. The females were between the ages of 18-30yrs. Participants completed a Food Frequency Questionnaire and answered other questions pertaining to their liking of milk and milk beverages, their knowledge of calcium, use of supplements (multivitamin/mineral) and their exercise habits.

**Results:** The results of this research showed that the preference of milk and milk beverages was the only factor that had an influence on calcium intake. It was found that the average calcium intake of female students at the University was 505mg a day. Only twenty five percent of the sample met the RDA of 700mg . The East Indian ethnic group was found to be at the greatest risk of developing calcium deficiencies.

**Conclusion:** Preference of milk and milk beverages was the only factor found to have an impact on calcium intake.