



What women need

Many women are short-changing themselves early in life, putting their health at risk down the track, writes **Daniel Hoy**

WOMEN are at far greater risk of developing osteoporosis during menopause.

And a severe lack of calcium earlier in their lives often exacerbates the problem.

The recommended daily intake (RDI) for women aged 19-50 is 1000mg; for those over 70 it is 1300mg.

The average woman aged 19-24 could only manage 750mg a day; women 25-44 762mg; women 45-64 769mg; and women over 60 686mg — all much lower than RDI.

Obviously calcium is important for bone strength, but what other nutrients should women make sure they have in their diet?

Dietitian Tara Diversi gives the

lowdown on the five most important nutrients for women:



Calcium

THIS is vital to prevent osteoporosis and other bone conditions. It's important throughout a woman's life but particularly post-menopause because oestrogen helps with absorption.

Most women don't eat enough calcium and therefore are at risk of osteoporosis.

Many women replace bone-promoting drinks of milk with fizzy drinks that are detrimental to bone health, or drink too much caffeine which also reduces bone health.

Good sources of calcium include dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt, fortified soy products, fish with bones, such as sardines, some nuts and legumes/lentils, and dark green vegetables such as broccoli.



Iron

IRON is important to prevent anaemia secondary to menstrual cycle.

This is a common deficiency in women and adolescent girls in their childbearing years because of blood loss through menstruation.

Iron is difficult to obtain if you are not eating animal products that are high in absorbable iron such as red meat, chicken and eggs.

Iron is also in dark green leafy vegetables and wholegrain cereals, though these types of iron are not as well absorbed. You can increase your absorption by having these iron-containing foods with vitamin C-containing foods such as orange juice, bright vegetables or berries.

B group vitamins

(especially B6 and folate)
 VITAMIN B is important because it enables women to access the benefits from the food they eat.

In addition, there is some evidence that they can help PMS symptoms and are good for stress. Folate is especially important for women who want to fall pregnant to reduce the risk of neural tube defects.

B group vitamins are found in fruits and vegetables, legumes, breads and cereal products, as well as Vegemite.

Many processed foods are fortified with B group vitamins because of their importance and because they are removed in some of the processing actions. As the saying goes, eating food that isn't processed is best.

If you drink too much alcohol, it is especially important that you have enough vitamin Bs because alcohol

reduces the absorption of B group vitamins.

Omega-3 fats

HEART disease kills more women than breast cancer, and omega-3 fats are good for heart health.

They have also been shown to be beneficial for skin health, meaning they can assist in reducing the signs of ageing.

Omega-3 fats also promote healthy brains, memory and may reduce risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

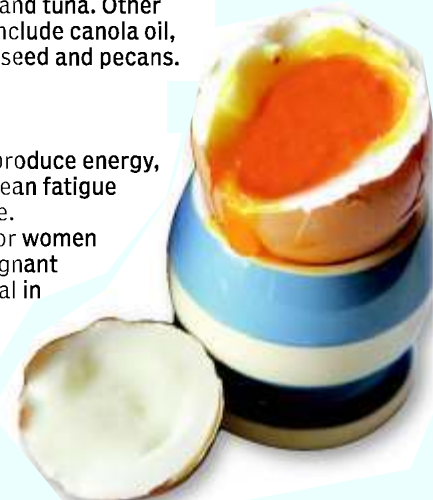
They are found in fish and seafood and are particularly high in fatty fish such as mackerel, salmon and tuna. Other sources of omega-3 include canola oil, walnuts, linseed, flaxseed and pecans.

Zinc

THIS helps the body produce energy, and a lack of it can mean fatigue and reduced sex drive.

Zinc is important for women trying to become pregnant because it is beneficial in fertility.

It is found mainly in animal products such as lean meat, organ meats, seafood such as oysters and eggs.



» Omega-3 fats for a healthy heart



» Zinc helps produce energy

Juice it: You can increase your absorption by having these iron-containing foods with vitamin C-containing foods such as orange juice, bright vegetables or berries.