Dr. Vasyly Kasiyan MD, a geriatrician at Elliot Senior Health Primary Care practice, provides recommendations to his patients about how much calcium is needed and what is the best source of calcium.

Good nutrition is important at any age to maintain proper health and strong bones. Including calcium in your diet helps to reduce bone loss and also decreases the risk of fracturing the vertebrae – the bones that surround the spinal cord. We often hear about the importance of children drinking milk to build strong bones. Consuming calcium early in life leads to higher bone mass in adulthood. This increase in bone density can reduce the risk of fractures later in life. As we age, absorption of calcium becomes more difficult. To absorb calcium efficiently your healthcare provider might recommend adding a calcium plus vitamin D supplement – which allows your body to absorb the calcium.

So how much calcium is enough? Men and premenopausal women should consume at least 1,000 mg of calcium, while postmenopausal women who do not take estrogen should consume 1,500 mg. You should not consume more than 2,000 mg of calcium per day due to the risk of side effects.

The current recommendation is that all adults should consume at least 800 international units of vitamin D per day. Lower levels of vitamin D are not as effective while high doses can be toxic, especially if taken for long periods of time. Vitamin supplements are now available which include calcium plus vitamin D.

Diet can be a main source of calcium intake. One method of estimating dietary calcium is to multiply the number of dairy servings consumed per day by 300 mg. One serving is 8 ounces (240 ml) of milk or yogurt or 1 ounce of hard cheese. Cottage cheese and ice cream contain approximately 150 mg of calcium per 4 ounces (120 ml). Other foods in a well-balanced diet (dark green vegetables, some nuts, bread, and cereals) supply an average of 100 mg of calcium daily. Some cereals, soy products, and fruit juices are fortified with up to 1,000 mg of calcium.

Proper calcium intake is important at any age. Because no two people are exactly alike and recommendations can vary from one person to another, it is important to seek guidance from a provider who is familiar with your individual situation. Your healthcare provider is an excellent source of information for questions and concerns related to your health.