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Letter to the Editors

Parathyroid hormone and dietary calcium

Bonofiglio *et al.* (2000) report raised mean serum parathyroid hormone (PTH) levels in low Ca eaters without reduction in vitamin D 'status' as judged by serum 25-hydroxy cholecalciferol. Whilst the increases in PTH may indeed be determined by reduction in Ca intake it is important to consider whether there could be a confounder at work within the high-Ca intake group leading to reduction of serum PTH in 'high'-Ca eaters despite comparable vitamin D status. Smoking has been reported to be associated with reduction in serum PTH as an independent factor in a number of studies and we have found a similar independent effect in a recent study of Asians living in East London (Hooper & Seeman, 1994; Landin-Wilhelmsen *et al.* 1995; Brot *et al.* 1999; Bonofiglio *et al.* 2000; BJ Boucher and N Mannan, unpublished results). Whilst girls of the age studied may not readily report that they smoke, it would be interesting to know whether the authors have been able to look at this possibility in their study. If not, can they account for the differences in Ca intake: since body weight was greater rather than less in the low Ca eaters it is unlikely that these subjects simply ate less. Might it be that those who start smoking early may have different eating patterns from those who do not?

B. J. Boucher

Academic Medical Unit
The Royal London Hospital
Whitechapel
London E1 1BB
United Kingdom

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