

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

“Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones ...

...but falls will never hurt me.” That altered version of the old nursery rhyme could be the theme for Adequate Calcium Today, a nationwide project that aims to teach early adolescents the importance of having enough calcium in the diet growing up to prevent osteoporosis in later life.

Osteoporosis affects 35 million Americans at an annual healthcare cost of nearly \$14 billion. Asians and Caucasians are at greater risk for osteoporosis than other ethnic groups. A study focusing on girls of Asian ancestry by CTAHR’s Rachel Novotny and others at UH-Mānoa is testing the effectiveness of a sixth-grade health curriculum especially designed to increase calcium consumption among adolescent girls. Why sixth graders? They are young and impressionable enough to have a chance of changing their eating behavior before age 17, when they have attained 95 percent of their bone mass and their attitudes are harder to change.

Armed with data from previous studies on what motivates 11- and 12-year-olds (information we all could use!), curriculum designers at UH have created an interactive, multimedia DVD/CD-ROM that will be used here and at five other cooperating Mainland universities with Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic ethnic groups. The hope is that the curriculum will help youngsters change their exercise and eating habits to become adults who avoid the debilitating, often crippling, effects of an expensive but preventable disease.

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ACT Study Coordinator Jane Yakuma examines an Asian adolescent girl for bone density at the Kapiolani Clinical Research Center