

## **Rickets on the Rise**

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Vitamin Cottage

It was once believed that Americans were past the time of nutrient-deficiency diseases like survey. Despite our country's abundant food supply, we are seeing a resurgence of nutrient deficiencies, particularly rickets. This childhood ailment occurs from a vitamin D and calcium deficiency that leads to soft bones, poor growth, and occasionally bowlegs. According to a study of malnutrition in children published in *Pediatrics* (April 2001; 107:1-7), the two main reasons that this condition is on the rise are because young toddlers are not consuming adequate amounts of vitamin D-rich foods (like cod liver oil, egg yolks, fatty fish), and more parents are turning to milk alternatives for nourishment. "In our report, we found cases of young children who are suffering from undernutrition simply because their parents fed them soy- or rice-based beverages that did not contain vitamin D, instead of cows' milk," said lead author Norman F. Carvalho, MD, a pediatrician at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Carvalho added "With increasing numbers of parents exploring strict vegetarian diets, many may be making inappropriate changes to their children's diets."

The researchers also concluded that children need to spend more time outdoors. Vitamin D can be produced in the body by sun exposure to the skin. Allow your children to play in the sun for a short while without sunscreen (which blocks vitamin D production), feed them vitamin D-rich foods, and make sure there is vitamin D in their multiple vitamin and mineral. In addition, breastfeeding mothers should consider taking in extra vitamin D as well, to pass on this valuable nutrient to their breastfeeding babies.