

Exercising and Osteoporosis

Good health is more than skin deep. To prolong your quality of life and ensure a strong skeletal frame for the future, it's time you start giving your bones a little TLC.

Keeping bones healthy is a lifelong process, and from childhood to adulthood, your eating and lifestyle habits can prevent you from developing a debilitating disease down the road.

Osteoporosis is a thinning of the bones that occurs over time. It appears mainly in women. However, men can be affected likewise. Main cause is lack of calcium in the diet, which means the body will take it from the bones, causing them to weaken over time. However, without vitamin D, the bones cannot absorb the calcium.

Most of the time osteoporosis manifests later in life. Most people do not realize that they have it until they fracture or break a bone.

Risk Factors for Osteoporosis

Although you cannot control all risk factors, there are things you can do to protect yourself. The National Osteoporosis Foundation lists the following risk factors:

Family history: If members of your family, like your mother, have had fractures, your risk for similar fractures increases.

Age: With age, risk increases because bones become weaker and less dense.

Gender: Although risk is greater for women, men also can develop osteoporosis. Women have less bone tissue to begin with and due to hormonal changes through menopause, tend to lose bone more rapidly than men.

Race: White and Asian women are more likely to develop osteoporosis than blacks or Hispanic women.

Bone structure: If you have a small bone frame and are thin (under 127 pounds) you are at risk.

Lifestyle: Consuming excessive amounts of alcohol, smoking cigarettes, not consuming adequate dietary calcium and vitamin D or performing few or no weight-bearing exercises enhances your chances of developing osteoporosis.

Menstrual history: Women who stop menstruating before menopause as a result of conditions such as anorexia or bulimia or because of excessive physical

exercise (Female Athlete Triad) also might lose large amounts of bone tissue, resulting in osteoporosis.

Reduce your risk

It's never too late to take steps to decrease the effects of osteoporosis. The denser your bones are before middle age, the more they will be able to withstand bone loss that occurs.

Limit sodas - too much sugar and phosphorus also can deplete calcium levels.

Limit caffeine and sodium intake – Excess caffeine and sodium can lead to bone loss. Have no more than 4 cups of coffee a day and less than 2400mg of sodium (equivalent to 1 teaspoon). Unfortunately a lot of sodium is hidden in food additives and preservatives. Start reading food labels.

Decrease alcohol consumption and smoking, which block calcium absorption.

Increase calcium-rich foods in your diet – e.g. dairy and green, leafy vegetables. In addition, start to supplement your diet with calcium and vitamin D. Also remember to expose your skin to sunshine for a few minutes, which allows the body to produce vitamin D naturally.

Increase weight-bearing exercises - Evidence shows that exercise may help build and maintain bone density at any age. Studies have seen bone density increase by doing regular resistance exercises, such as lifting weights, two or three times a week. This type of weight bearing exercise appears to stimulate bone formation, and the retention of calcium, in the bones that are bearing the load. The force of muscles pulling against bones stimulates this bone building process. So any exercise that places force on a bone will strengthen that bone.

Weight-bearing exercises are the most effective to build bones. These include activities such as walking, stair climbing, running, hiking, and weight lifting. Swimming and bicycling are not considered weight-bearing exercises.

Exercise will also increase muscle strength, coordination, and balance and therefore decrease the likelihood of falls in the elderly.

Summary

Osteoporosis is avoidable for most people by making a few lifestyle changes. Start to introduce some of the changes slowly so you can stick to it for the rest of your life. For example start to walk 10 minutes 3 times a week and increase the length of the walk over time or add more walking days. Use a food diary to see where you can improve your eating habits. It also keeps you accountable. Invest

some time in finding a natural supplement that can be absorbed by the body at the cellular level.

Since osteoporosis is multifactorial and has a genetic component, there are a small percentage of people for whom it may not be possible to avoid bone loss with diet, exercise and good bone health.