

IMPROVEMENT THROUGH MOVEMENT

Understanding Osteoporosis

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Osteoporosis is a disease that consists of weakened bones and increased fracture risk. It's sometimes called a "silent disease" with few, if any, noticeable changes to your health to indicate you have it. In fact, the first indication of osteoporosis often is when a bone breaks.

Although it can strike at any age, osteoporosis mostly occurs in people over age 50. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, half of women and one in four men over the age of 50 will break a bone due to osteoporosis.

Taking steps to build bone health while you are young can literally make or break what will happen to your bones as you age. However, at every age, a healthful diet and regular weight-bearing exercise are important, helping to ensure bone tissue continues to build.

Bone Health and Diet

Bones may seem dry and dull, but they are far from it. They are constantly under construction; certain cells break down bone tissue and other cells use the calcium and nutrients from foods you eat to build new bone. If you are not physically active or getting the nutrition you need, bones will suffer — becoming less dense, weaker and more likely to fracture.

Bone-Building Nutrients

Calcium, the major nutrient needed to form new bone cells, is vital for bone health. Bones store more than 99 percent of the calcium in your body. Some calcium-rich foods include milk, yogurt and cheese, and calcium-fortified soy milk and fruit juice. Other good sources include soybeans, dark green leafy vegetables and calcium-fortified tofu. Calcium needs change at different stages of life:

Children ages 1 to 3 need at least 700 milligrams of calcium a day.

Children ages 4 to 8 need at least 1,000 milligrams of calcium a day.

Children ages 9 to 18 need at least 1,300 milligrams of calcium a day.

Adults ages 19 to 50 need at least 1,000 milligrams of calcium a day.

Women over age 50 and men over age 70 need at least 1,200 milligrams of calcium a day.

Important note: Most kids are not meeting their calcium needs.

Calcium cannot build bones alone. It works with other nutrients including vitamin D, vitamin K, potassium and magnesium to increase bone density and strength.

Foods vs. Supplements

Supplements can't duplicate what foods offer naturally. If you are not able or prefer not to drink milk, make sure you're eating plenty of non-dairy calcium-rich and calcium-fortified foods and beverages. Consult with your doctor about taking a calcium supplement with vitamin D, especially if you are a woman in menopause or post-menopause.

A registered dietitian nutritionist can help you choose the best supplement for your bones and talk with your health care provider to determine if you may be at risk for osteoporosis.

