Top 6 Bone-Building Foods for Osteoporosis

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

The Best Foods for Osteoporosis

When you were diagnosed with osteoporosis, it is likely that your physician spoke with you about specific over-the-counter supplements that you should be taking. Perhaps you are now taking a prescription medication to prevent further bone loss. They may have discussed beginning an exercise regimen to build bones and promote balance, which will help to prevent fractures. There are also foods for osteoporosis that can help your symptoms. So, they may have talked about “boning up” your diet with foods high in calcium and vitamin D.

Here’s a quick explanation about the importance of both calcium and vitamin D for your bone health. We also cover six foods to fight osteoporosis that you can incorporate into your diet today.

Calcium and Bone Health

Calcium has a lot of benefits. You’ve probably heard that you need to drink your milk to build your bones, and this old adage is true, but calcium is so much more than that.

One of calcium’s biggest roles is promoting bone health. In fact, Harvard Health states that about 99% of the calcium found in our bodies is in the form of teeth and bone, so it stands to reason that an appropriate intake will keep our bones and teeth strong.

Other roles for calcium include promotion of blood clotting (such as when you cut your finger, and you get a scab) and it also aids the nervous system with sending impulses and helping the muscles contract.

There are gender and age-specific recommendations regarding the appropriate calcium intake. These recommendations include supplementation, as well as food intake.

Women:

- **50 and younger:** 1,000 milligrams daily.
- **51 and older:** 1,200 milligrams daily.

Men:

- **70 and younger:** 1,000 milligrams daily.
- **71 and older:** 1,200 milligrams daily.

Vitamin D and Bone Health

Like calcium, vitamin D also has multiple roles in the body. Its primary role is to help the body absorb calcium. Without vitamin D, the body would not absorb calcium as effectively. The body needs an appropriate amount of

both calcium and vitamin D to keep bones strong and healthy.

It also helps to block the release of parathyroid hormone. Parathyroid hormone reabsorbs bone, which causes the bones to become thin and brittle. Without vitamin D, the effect of the parathyroid hormone could cause brittle bones.

Unrelated to bone health, vitamin D may also help to promote immune health.

The amount we need to take in is still being researched and is thus a controversial topic. However, there are daily recommendations, and they are based on age:

- **Ages 9 to 70:** 600 international unites per day; upper-level intake is 4,000 international units per day.
- **Over the age 70:** 800 international units per day; upper-level intake is 4,000 international units per day.
- **Ages 14 to 50 who are pregnant or lactating:** 600 international units per day; upper-level intake is 4.000 international units per day.

Now that we know the roles of both calcium and vitamin D, let's discuss several options that are great for your bones. We all know that dairy is rich in calcium, so you won't find it on this list.

What Foods Are Good to Eat for Osteoporosis?

1. Dark, Leafy Greens

Dark leafy greens are a rich source of calcium. One cup of these greens has about 200 milligrams of calcium or about 20% of your daily needs. Examples include spinach, kale, bok choy collard greens and turnip greens.

2. Salmon

Salmon is an osteoporosis powerhouse. It is rich in both calcium and vitamin D. It also contains a high amount of omega-3 fatty acids, which promotes bone health.

Canned tuna is even better – 3 ounces of salmon contains about 183 milligrams of calcium. Why? The canned varieties include the tiny bones that are rich in calcium and they are so tiny that you don't even know you are eating them.

3. Almond Butter

If you are a peanut butter eater, consider making the switch. Almond butter has 112 milligrams of calcium per serving, which is generally two tablespoons. Also, it is rich in potassium, which supports bone health.

4. Plant-Based Milks

I said that we wouldn't include dairy, but this begs to be added. Many people shy away from plant-based milk because they believe that they are deficient in nutrients, like calcium.

However, many plant-based kinds of milk have been fortified with calcium to boost their nutritional profile. Check out the nutrition facts when you are grocery shopping – especially if you have specific reasons to avoid dairy.

5. Eggs

Egg yolks are rich in vitamin D. As a society, we have been conditioned to believe that we need to toss out the yolks for heart health. However, if you are eating for bone health, you may need to consume egg yolks.

It's important to speak with your physician or a registered dietitian about your specific needs if you also have heart disease.

6. Beans

Beans are another rich source of calcium. Plus, they are inexpensive and versatile.

Purchase a bag of beans and soak them for multiple different recipes, or buy a can of beans (or several) and toss them into a chili or bean soup for a meal that is calcium-rich and can be consumed on different occasions.

Did you know 1 cup of beans contains 191 milligrams of calcium? That's about 20% of your daily calcium needs.

The Bottom Line

Your bones depend on you to keep them strong and healthy. You must take the medications as prescribed by your physician, but incorporating calcium and vitamin D-rich foods can prevent further bone loss. Know that dairy is also a rich source of calcium, but also try incorporating several of the options we have presented for better bone health!