Don’t Eat These 6 Bad-for-Your-Bones Foods

by JOSH DUVAUCHELLE

Six Bad Foods for Osteoporosis

Nearly 10 percent of adults over the age of 40 have already been diagnosed with osteoporosis, but even those who haven't received an official diagnosis aren't necessarily in the clear. In fact, 29 percent of women over the age of 50 who do NOT have an osteoporosis diagnosis are still at a very high risk of bone fractures.

You’ve likely already heard some of the common advice for improving bone strength and minimizing the risks of osteoporosis:

- Eat a diet high in calcium, as well as vitamin D (the vitamin improves calcium absorption).
- Do weight-bearing exercise, which can increase your bone strength and density by up to 3 percent.
- Avoid habits that weaken your bones, such as smoking.

But what you avoid and don’t do is also just as important as what you add to your life. And while certain foods can improve your bone health, there are also several specific foods that do quite the opposite.

Whether you currently have an osteoporosis diagnosis, or you simply want to maintain strong bones so you can enjoy your current lifestyle long into retirement, you'll find the information in this article helpful.

Alcohol

Before heading to happy hour, keep in mind that a cocktail or two might not be such happy news for your bones. "Heavy drinking is well known to be associated with osteoporosis and...fractures," reports a study published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

The study notes that this is especially true for people who drink a lot. "Long-term heavy drinkers have multiple risk factors for bone loss, including low dietary calcium and other nutritional deficiencies," it warns.

According to the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, alcohol has several immediate effects on your bone strength and bone mineral density:

- Drinking throws off your body’s internal calcium balance.
- Alcohol prevents your body from producing calcium properly, which in turn affects calcium absorption.
- Alcoholic beverages affect testosterone levels in men, and estrogen levels in women, thereby raising your risk for osteoporosis.
- Alcohol increases levels of the stress hormone called cortisol, and cortisol speeds up how quickly your bones break down.
- Alcohol affects balance, increasing your risks of bone fractures related to slips and falls.

Meat

While eating healthy levels of protein is important for bone health, overeating meat can weaken your bones. “High protein diets that contain multiple servings of meat and protein with each meal can also cause the body to lose calcium,” warns the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

That's because of how your body processes animal protein. Meat and other animal-based foods are high in sulfur-rich amino acids, such as cysteine. When sulfur is broken down, it acidifies your blood. To neutralize this acidity, your body needs calcium, and it often turns to the calcium in your bones to accomplish precisely that.

According to some researchers, eliminating animal proteins in your diet can reduce your calcium loss by up to 50 percent. Even if you’re not ready to go vegan, making one or more of your meals each day built around the whole, plant-based foods may improve your bone strength.

Salty Foods

The average American should eat no more than 2,300 milligrams of salt every day, yet most people eat more than 3,400mg daily! And that spells bad news for your bones.

For every 2,300 mg of salt in your diet, you lose 40 mg of calcium through your urine. In other words, the more salt coming in, the more bone calcium going out!

And it's not just French fries, potato chips and other so-called "salty foods" that you need to watch for. Many foods sneak in a surprising amount of sodium. For example, the average slice of bread can contain up to 230 mg of salt, and a serving of some common breakfast cereals can add 300 mg of salt to your diet.

Check the nutrition labels, and cut back on salt as much as you can. If your food needs a little more pizazz, try salt-free options like spices to add flavor.

Soft Drinks

A 2014 study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* followed 73,000 postmenopausal women. They found that drinking soft drinks (i.e., soda) increased the risks of weak bones and hip fractures, regardless of whether it was a diet or non-diet soft drink. Risks climbed the more soda you drank.

This may be because most carbonated beverages are high in phosphoric acid, which increases the amount of calcium you lose through your urine. Combine that with the fact that most soft drinks are devoid of calcium and other nutrients, and you present a considerable problem for your bone health.

If you find plain water boring and struggle to stay hydrated, try adding lemon wedges or frozen fruit to your water to make it taste more appealing.

Coffee

A morning cup o’ Joe is an oh-no for bone mineral density since caffeine has been linked to increased bone mineral loss and increased bone weakness.

In general, you should cap your caffeine intake to approximately 400 mg of caffeine a day. That's the equivalent of three 8-ounce cups of black coffee.

Alternatively, try green tea. It has a gentle amount of caffeine, so it can still help you get your morning going every day. However, it is high in plant-based antioxidant compounds that researchers say may strengthen your bones and prevent bone loss.

Tofu and Other Soy-Based Foods

The jury is still out on this one since studies have reported conflicting results. However, some researchers are worried that oxalates in soy protein can bind with calcium and make it harder for your body to use.

If you enjoy tempeh, tofu, soybeans (edamame) and other soy foods, you may minimize your risks by:

- Eating only whole-food forms of soy, such as soybeans, but avoiding foods that contain processed or concentrated soy extracts.
- Ensuring your diet is high in calcium, potentially negating the absorption problems linked with soy.
- Taking in a variety of plant-based proteins, such as hemp, beans, seeds, and nuts, and not making soy-based foods your primary source of protein.

By minimizing how much of these six foods you enjoy, you may minimize your risks of diet-related bone loss and osteoporosis. Keep in mind that diet isn’t the only factor in bone strength. Talk to your doctor or a dietitian first about the many different dietary and lifestyle changes you can do today to boost your bone health.