Healthy Tips for Living With Osteoporosis

by ANGELA FINLAY

Lifestyle Changes to Make for Living With Osteoporosis

An osteoporosis diagnosis can seem bleak, but you have more control over your current (and future) bone health than you might imagine. In fact, the small decisions you make each day are just as important as your prescribed osteoporosis medications.

Smoking should be the first thing to go. Nicotine attacks bone mass, and cigarette smoke interferes with osteoporosis medication so much, it often cancels out the beneficial effects. However, that's only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to lifestyle changes.

Consider making adjustments in three primary areas — exercise, diet, and your home environment — for a significant improvement in your health and happiness.

Build Up Your Bones with the Right Activity

Living a healthy life with thinning bones is about protecting your bone mass, but also rebuilding lost bone. Quitting smoking and healthy diet changes can help a lot with the bone protection, but you'll need to challenge your bones with resistance in order to build the strength back up.

Exercise is an important form of stress for your body: it improves flexibility, builds muscle, and stabilizes your entire musculoskeletal system. Of course, there are dozens of types of exercises, and you'll need to choose the ones that work best for your bones.

Work in Some Weight Bearing Exercise

Simple, low-impact aerobic activity is a wonderful place to begin, especially if you're relatively new to daily exercise. Any time you work your body against gravity, you're strengthening your muscles and bones. However, the higher your exertion, the greater the resistance — and the more remarkable the rewards.

If you can work up to jogging, aerobics, or jump rope, you're on the path to measurably stronger bones. Even though the high impact isn't amazing for arthritic joints, it does the most for bone strength; if you have joint problems, talk with your doctor about the best way to balance your particular needs.

Learn to Pace Yourself

Running every day is sure to stress your body too much, and the more injuries you suffer, the greater your risk of a damaging fall. Embrace balance by taking up yoga, Pilates, or tai chi alongside your new bone-strengthening workouts: these all help to strengthen the muscles around the spine, and since the spine is one of the most common site of fractures, this can keep you mobile for longer. Exercise that targets your core will also improve your posture and balance.

Make Healthy Diet Substitutions

There are a few clear and easy ways to prevent more bone loss and maintain your strength through your daily diet. A balanced menu is a smart way to begin, but some specific substitutions that can tip the scales in your favor.

Tea Instead of Alcohol

It can seem like a bit of a sacrifice at first, but opting for mint, fruit, or black teas over that extra evening drink can make a pretty big difference in your bone health. Studies show that two or more alcoholic drinks a day can hamper bone formation, and the more you drink, the higher your chance of falling.

Conversely, a cup of the right tea can have welcome effects on your body and mind. Feeling stressed? Camomile and lemon balm are calming. If you need a bit of a pick-me-up, choose black tea over coffee: a recent Australian study found that older women who were regular tea drinkers had higher bone density than those who didn't drink tea very often, even after accounting for things like history of smoking and calcium supplementation.

Next page: some more healthy diet substitutions, plus some tips for staying safe.

Make Healthy Diet Substitutions

Fortified Juice Instead of Soda

It's no secret that sugary soda is terrible for you, and evidence shows the negative effects reach right down to your bones. However, it's not the carbonation that's the biggest problem, but rather the phosphoric acid (and caffeine) that accompanies it. Since phosphoric acid and caffeine can promote calcium excretion in your urine, these drinks keep the all-important mineral from reaching your bones and cells.

Generally, the sugar-laden and artificially-flavored soda waters are more problematic than natural carbonated mineral water, but it's best to check the ingredient label before assuming you're in the clear. Aside from taking in a good amount of fresh water each day, you may want to include a small glass or two of calcium-fortified orange juice to treat your taste buds while you boost your bones.

Leafy Greens Instead of Potatoes

Not only are green veggies packed with far more nutrients than their light-colored cousins, many of them are high in calcium — and more calcium is always a good thing when you have thinning bones. Spinach, collard greens, and turnip or beet greens should make regular appearances on your weekly menu. Broccoli is a calcium powerhouse, too.

A half cup of makes a serving, but it's difficult to go overboard here; why not sub out your calorie-packed starch for an extra helping of greens? Their high fiber content will also keep you fuller for longer than easily digested carbohydrates like rice and potatoes.

Herbs Instead of Salt

Experts agree that too much salt promotes calcium loss through the urine, and some of that calcium will come directly from the bones. In fact, reducing your salt intake from 10 grams a day to 5 grams a day could have as much of an impact on your hip bone density as increasing your daily calcium by 1000 mg.

But giving up salt doesn't have to mean giving up flavor. When you're cooking at home (which you should aim to do most of the time), switch out that extra shake of salt for an extra clove of garlic, a dash of chili or cumin, or a handful of fresh flat parsley or chives. These ingredients pack a big punch in a small pinch, which should help you round out your dishes without resorting to sodium.

Since it’s difficult to get all the calcium you need in food and drink alone, bolster your healthier diet with a calcium and vitamin D supplement. Talk to your doctor about the best form and the right amount for your needs, and make it part of your osteoporosis medication regimen.

Stay Safe

There’s plenty you can do to prevent a nasty fall in your home. You may not need a device to help you walk around, but consider making things easier on yourself with some clever additions and smart organization:

- Low-heeled shoes offer more stability, especially if they have non-slip soles.
- Put grab bars wherever you need them, from the bathroom to the bedroom and front hallway
- Keep floors clear of clutter, and get rid of loose area rugs, so you don’t have to worry about lifting your feet more than necessary.

You doctor is definitely one of your best allies — keep in close contact, and bring up any concerns promptly. Some medications can cause dizziness or loss of balance, putting you at risk for a fall, so you need to know if any of your other prescribed drugs might be working against you. Your doctor will also conduct periodic bone mineral density tests according to your extent of bone loss and other unique health factors.