8 Ways You Can Reduce Your Risk of Developing Osteoporosis

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Osteoporosis Prevention

Osteoporosis is a condition that causes a person's bones to become weak and prone to breaks. Without prevention measures or treatment, osteoporosis can progress, and it is likely you will not know you have the condition until you break a bone.

Osteoporosis can affect anyone of any age, although it seems to be more common in women older than age 50. Fortunately, there is a lot you can do to potentially prevent osteoporosis and strengthen your bones.

Here are eight ways you can work to reduce your risk of developing osteoporosis and protect your bone health with general osteoporosis prevention strategies.

1. Exercise

Exercise is important for preventing osteoporosis. In fact, this is one of the best ways to make your bones stronger.

The best exercises for preventing osteoporosis are weight-bearing ones, including walking, hiking, jogging, climbing steps and dancing.

A second type of exercise that can prevent osteoporosis is resistance exercise. This type of exercise includes activities that build muscle mass and promote bone strength, including weightlifting.

Exercise offers the additional benefit of increasing coordination, improving balance and leading to overall improved health.

If you are elderly, already have osteoporosis, have heart or lung disease, or if you have not exercised throughout adulthood, talk to your doctor before starting any new exercise program.

2. Get Enough Calcium and Vitamin D

You need calcium for building bone strength, but, like most Americans, you are probably not getting the required daily amount.

Vitamin D is also important for protecting bones, and your body needs it to absorb calcium. Most people can get enough vitamin D from sunlight, eating vitamin D-rich foods or by taking supplements.

When the body does not have enough calcium and vitamin D, your bones will break down and you will lose bone mass. Therefore, it is important to get enough calcium and vitamin D every day.

You can get calcium from:

- Low-fat and fat-free dairy.
- Calcium fortified juices and foods — cereal, tofu, soy milk, etc.
- Sardines and salmon with bones.
- Dark, leafy green vegetables, including kale and broccoli.

You need vitamin D to help your body absorb calcium, but not many foods contain vitamin D. However, you can get it from:

- Fatty fish — salmon, tuna, or mackerel.
- Egg yolks.
- Cheese.
- Vitamin D fortified foods — milk, cereal or juice.

You can also get vitamin D from sunlight. You can do this by spending some time outdoors every day, but do not overdo it; too much sun increases the risk of developing skin cancer.

If you think you are not getting enough calcium or vitamin D, ask your doctor if you need supplements.

3. Diet

The food you eat affects your bones. While there is not a specific diet for osteoporosis, your best bet is to eat a diet low in sodium, rich in fresh fruits and vegetables and minimal processed (refined) grains.

Include foods rich in calcium and vitamin D in your diet and ask your doctor about supplements if needed. Be sure to limit the amount of caffeine, sugar and carbonated drinks you are consuming.

4. Reduce Alcohol Intake

Alcohol has a negative effect on bone health. Researchers think it interferes with the balance of calcium and the absorption of vitamin D.

Heavy drinking can also contribute to hormone deficiencies. Deficiencies of hormones — most often thyroid, estrogen and testosterone — affect the bone remodeling process and reduce bone mass.

5. Quit Smoking

Smoking is an identified risk factor for osteoporosis. Quitting is necessary for your overall health, including your bone health.

6. Review Medication

Some medications — when used for long periods — can cause bone loss and make bones weak. This includes corticosteroids — medications that treat conditions such as arthritis, asthma and lupus.

If you are taking medications that are known for causing bone loss, you doctor will likely have you on the lowest possible dose for the shortest amount of time.

7. Early Screening

Bone density testing looks at a small part of one or more bones to see how strong they are and to diagnose or rule out osteoporosis.

The most common test used is called a dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) scan. This test uses a small amount of radiation to measure bone density.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends women 65 and older and younger women who have a higher than normal chance of bone fracture should ask their doctors about screening for osteoporosis. Your doctor is in the best position to decide whether a DEXA scan is right for you.

8. Medications to Make Bones Stronger

There are medications that can help you maintain and build bones. The most common type is a bisphosphonate, either taken as a pill by mouth, as an injection, or as an infusion treatment.

These medications can strengthen bones by helping them retain calcium. Doctors usually prescribe them for people who have a high risk for osteoporosis and fractures.

Ask your doctor if osteoporosis prevention medications can help you.

The Takeaway

Osteoporosis can be prevented in most people. Prevention is important because there is no cure for the condition.

You can reduce your risk by managing the lifestyle factors associated with the condition. If you suspect you are at high risk, ask your doctor about medications that make bones stronger and early screening.