The Importance of an Osteoporosis Diet

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How Your Daily Menu Can Feed or Starve Your Bones

A sturdy skeleton is vital for good health and longevity, but bones need maintenance. If you're already losing bone density, you'll need to be even more careful about what you take in to your body — after all, you are what you eat.

Not surprisingly, calcium tops the list of helpful minerals for bone health. Most adults need 700 mg each day, but if you have osteoporosis, your doctor may recommend you get 1000 mg a day. Vitamin D is the next most important compound for bone health, since it's crucial for calcium absorption.

There's also protein, magnesium, potassium, and a long list of other vitamins and minerals that work in tandem to strengthen and protect your bones. In fact, your daily diet has a huge role to play in your bone health, especially during and after menopause when osteoporosis risk rises. Find out what to include, what to avoid and why.

How the Right Food Can Help Your Body

Bone loss may be common and difficult to reverse, but there's plenty you can do to stop the progression and restore strength and stability. Whether you're at risk for weak bones or you've already been diagnosed with osteoporosis, you can tailor your diet to:

Protect Against Bone Loss

The vitamins and minerals you take in can help counter the loss of bone that begins in your 30s. Consuming more calcium, for instance, ensures the body doesn't suck the calcium from your bones, leaving them weakened. Calcium can also encourage the production of bone cells, which will make up for some of the bone loss that occurs as time goes on.

Keep Bones Flexible

While lean meats and eggs may not feed bone mass like calcium can, protein is an important building block in collagen — a protein that gives bones their flexibility. Bones are made of about 1/3 collagen, so losing even a portion of your stores through an inadequate diet can leave you more vulnerable to fractures.

Strengthen Supportive Muscle

Along with regular exercise, a diet with enough of all the necessary macronutrients — fat, carbohydrates and protein — will help you build more muscle around your bones. It should come as no surprise that the stronger the muscle around delicate or hardworking areas, the more padding, stability and protection you give to those bones and joints.

What to Include in Your Diet

You first course of action is to inject calcium-rich, vitamin D-loaded and ultra-nutritious ingredients into your daily menu. This isn't the time to restrict yourself to a specific diet — in fact, restrictive diets will starve your bones — but rather to choose a smart variety of foods, including:

- **Milk.** If you're not a big milk drinker, work it into your menu in other ways: you can easily add it to soups, sauces or smoothies.
- **Leafy greens.** Dark greens like spinach, kale, chard, cabbage, broccoli, fennel and mustard greens have an astounding amount of calcium, vitamin K, potassium, and a host of other bone-friendly nutrients.
- **Salmon.** Fresh salmon is a wonderful fish, loaded with healthy fats and one of the few food sources of vitamin D. If you want a dose of calcium along with the omega 3s and vitamin D, try canned salmon.
- **Almonds.** Not only do almonds have a good amount of calcium (80 mg in a single ounce), but they're also high in magnesium and protein.
- **Soy.** Soybeans have made their way into the modern diet — and that's good news for bones. Just a half cup of boiled soybeans contains 100 mg of calcium, and pressed tofu can contain up to 750 mg per serving.
- **Fortified foods.** You can find all sorts of products fortified with calcium, especially cereals and juices.

Although certain foods can go farther for bone health than others, a balanced diet is key to a strong skeleton. Taking in a wide array of foods will make sure you get a wide array of vitamins, nutrients and minerals — all very necessary for cell rejuvenation, energy and muscle building.

Avoid These Foods for Better Bone Health

It's not always enough to add more nutritious foods to your menu — you may need to get rid of some, as well. Most processed foods will work against your bone health in a few ways, so get those out of your pantry. You should be particularly wary of:

- **Salt.** Table salt is known to leach calcium from bones. Processed foods like deli meat, frozen meals, canned soups, and bread and cereal products pack a lot of sodium; cutting them out will make a big difference in your salt intake.
- **Caffeine.** It's not quite as bad as salt, but caffeine can affect your calcium stores, too. Keep your caffeine intake to one small cup of coffee or a mug of black tea a day (herbal tea is fine), and instead get your energy boosts through fresh fruit and veggies.
- **Soft drinks.** It's not the sugar in bubbly soft drinks that causes trouble, but the phosphoric acid. Not every carbonated beverage contains phosphoric acid (soda water or sparkling mineral water are fine), but you should only enjoy other types of soda on occasion.

It's All About Balance

Keep in mind you can get too much of a good thing. For instance, regularly consuming more than 2500 mg of calcium a day can interfere with magnesium and iron absorption. Too much vitamin D can cause your body to retain too much calcium in the blood, bringing on nausea and even an abnormal heart rhythm.

The good news is it's very difficult to overdose on diet alone. Too many supplements are usually to blame, so with close attention you shouldn't have trouble staying within healthy limits.

Start by talking to your doctor about your current diet, and where you should aim to be. They will know whether any supplements deserve to play a part, and they can connect you with a nutritionist for some helpful guidance.