Osteoporosis and Alcohol

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How Does Drinking Alcohol Affect Your Bones?

While enjoying the occasional glass of wine is fine, if you can't limit how much alcohol you drink you should be aware how your bones can be affected.

Excessive alcohol intake affects your bone health in several ways. If you drink too much alcohol, the levels of parathyroid hormone PTH are altered, leading to an imbalance of calcium and other nutrients that keep your bones healthy.

Other hormones, such as testosterone and estrogen, are also influenced. Sex hormones play an important role in the production of bone cells and bone repair.

Cortisol, the "stress" hormone is increased if your drink heavily for a long time, and this hormone is also involved in bone formation.

Drinking too much (i.e. 2-3 oz of alcohol daily) will also decrease the ability of your stomach to absorb calcium from foods. The pancreas will also become unable to absorb calcium and vitamin D. Alcohol affects the liver as well, and this organ is involved in vitamin D activation.

Additionally, if you drink too much, you'll likely have problems with gait and balance, being more likely to suffer from falls and subsequent fractures.

Studies confirm that heavy alcohol intake is associated with increased risk of fractures, including hip and vertebrae fractures.

Simply put, alcohol promotes bone loss and increases your chances to suffer fractures.

Prevent the Negative Effects of Excessive Drinking

There is good news: if you stop abusing alcohol, some lost bone can be restored. It's never too late to stop drinking. In addition to easing up on the booze, there are some other things you can do to prevent the negative effects of alcohol.

- **Eat well.** Vitamins and minerals work in synergy to keep your whole body, including your bones, in optimal shape. When it comes to bone health, your priority is to improve your levels of calcium and vitamin D. Therefore, add more foods in your diet that are rich in these nutrients: low fat dairy products like yogurt, kefir or cheese, green leafy vegetables (for calcium), fatty fish, egg yolks, liver (for vitamin D).

- **Consider supplements.** Diet doesn't provide enough vitamin D, as this nutrient is mostly produced in your skin when exposed to the sun. Consider taking these nutrients in supplement form as well, along with

a multi mineral, multi-vitamin formula (other nutrient deficiencies are commonly associate with chronic alcohol consumption).

- **If you smoke, quit.** Smokers absorb less calcium from the diet. When you quit smoking there are also higher changes to abstain from alcohol, too, according to studies. Psychotherapy can help with both alcohol and smoking cessation. Prescription medication is also available in both cases.
- **Work out regularly.** Bones become stronger and healthier when you exercise. The best exercise for OP prevention and management is weight bearing exercise such as walking, lifting weights or climbing stairs.
- **Follow up with your doctor regularly.** Get the BMD (bone mineral density) test which measures your bone density. This test can detect OP before you start having symptoms, or experience a fracture.