



Take steps to prevent osteoporosis

My mother was recently diagnosed with osteoporosis. What can I do to reduce my risk, and my children's?

There are a number of things you can do, and it's never too late to start.

Although osteoporosis, or weak bones, is more common in women, about one in five cases strikes men. The Surgeon General estimates that 44 million Americans, or 55 percent of people 50 years old or older, face a major health risk because of osteoporosis.

The best prevention starts early. Up to 90 percent of adult bone mass is built up by age 18 in girls and 20 in boys. Building strong bones during youth can help prevent problems later in life.

Unfortunately, warning signs of this disease are few and far between. As the National Osteoporosis Foundation says, people cannot feel their bones getting weaker. Many times, the first sign of osteoporosis is a broken bone resulting from a minor fall, or, in severe cases, a forceful sneeze.

To help keep your bones strong:

- Get the recommended amount of calcium and vitamin D. Children and adolescents ages 9 to 18 need the most calcium — 1,300 milligrams a day. Toddlers ages 1 to 3 need 500 milligrams of calcium, and children ages 4 to 8 need 800 milligrams. Adults ages 19 to 49 need 1,000 milligrams, while those 50 and older need 1,200 milligrams. The need for vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium, increases with age: 200

International Units up to age 18; 400 to 800 IUs from 19 to 49; and 800 to 1,000 IUs for those 50 and older.

Calcium is listed on Nutrition Facts labels as a percent of its "Daily Value." The Daily Value for calcium is 1,000 milligrams. To figure out how much calcium is in a food, just add a zero to the Daily Value number — a food with 30 percent of calcium's Daily Value has 300 milligrams. A cup of milk has 300 milligrams; a cup of chopped, cooked kale has 90 milligrams.

- Engage in regular weight-bearing and strengthening exercise. Like muscles, bones get stronger if you make them work. Weight-bearing exercises include aerobics, fast walking or running, and stair-climbing. Because biking and swimming don't help your body move against gravity, they're not weight-bearing exercises and don't help strengthen bones. Resistance and strengthening exercises include lifting weights; using elastic bands or weight machines; and standing, rising on your toes or otherwise lifting your own body weight.

- Stop smoking and avoid excessive alcohol. Both can weaken bones.

- Talk to your health professional about bone health.

For more details, see the National Osteoporosis Foundation's Web site at <http://www.nof.org/>.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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