Bone Health Basics

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to become thin or weak, and break easily. You cannot feel or see your bones getting thinner. The most common broken bones linked with osteoporosis are the spine, wrist, and hip. A broken bone can stop you from working and from doing things you enjoy and greatly reduce your quality of life.

Who is at Risk?
If you answer yes to any of the potential risk factors listed below, you should discuss testing your bone mineral levels with your doctor. Having more than one risk factor does not mean you will develop osteoporosis or have a fracture.

• I am a woman older than 65 years or a man older than 70 years.
• I am Caucasian or Asian.
• I have broken a bone after age 50.
• I have lost more than 1½ inches of height.
• I rarely get enough calcium or vitamin D.
• I take steroid medications.

There are other factors that can contribute to osteoporosis. Make sure that you discuss them with a healthcare professional.

Prevention
Osteoporosis prevention should begin in childhood, but it shouldn’t stop there. Whatever your age, the habits you adopt now can affect your bone health for the rest of your life.

Nutrition
Calcium and Vitamin D are important to build stronger, denser bones early in life and to keep bones strong and healthy later in life.

• Food is the best source of calcium. Dairy products, such as low-fat and non-fat milk, yogurt and cheese are high in calcium.
• The amount of calcium you need from a supplement depends on the amount of calcium you get in your diet. Speak with your health professional to determine how many milligrams of calcium supplements you need per day.

Exercise
Bone is living tissue that responds to exercise by becoming stronger. Bones get stronger and denser when you make them work. (National Osteoporosis Foundation) An ideal exercise program combines weight-bearing, muscle strengthening and balance exercises.

Weight-bearing exercises are physical activities in which your body works against gravity. Try walking, dancing or climbing stairs.

Muscle strengthening exercises are physical activities that build the muscle that helps support your bones. This includes lifting weights, using elastic exercise bands or lifting your own body weight.

Balance exercises are activities that may help to reduce your risk of falling, such as T’ai Chi. Bone healthy actions should begin in childhood and continue throughout your life. It is never too early or too late for you to take steps to have strong bones.

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