



EXTENSION

Nutrition for Older Adults: Diet and Health Guidelines to Lower The Risk Of Osteoporosis

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Bone Changes with Age

Many people do not think they need calcium after they stop growing. The truth is your bones are constantly being broken down and rebuilt and your need for calcium never ends.

From birth to about age 35, your body builds bone mass faster than it breaks it down. After about age 35, the body breaks down bone mass faster than it builds it. This is part of the natural aging process.

Estrogen helps protect the bones. After women experience menopause the body removes calcium from bones at an even faster rate due to the loss of estrogen.

As you lose bone mass your bones become more porous, thin and weaker. This can lead to increased risk of bone fracture or osteoporosis.

What Is Osteoporosis?

With osteoporosis, the bones become so porous, thin and weak they easily break. The bones that tend to break easily are in the spine, hip, and wrist.

Osteoporosis is called a "silent disease." You may not know your bones have been losing strength for years until you break a bone.

Symptoms of Osteoporosis

In addition to bones that easily break, other signs of osteoporosis are backaches, curvature of the spine, and loss of height.

Who Is At Risk?

Osteoporosis affects millions of Americans, but people at higher risk include those who:

- Are female (but males can get osteoporosis).
- Have a family history of osteoporosis.
- Have a small body frame.
- Are older (risk increases with age).
- Are not physically active or have extended bed rest.
- Have not gotten enough calcium or vitamin D throughout their lives.
- Have gone through menopause or had surgery to remove their ovaries.
- Smoke or consume alcohol in excess. These increase calcium loss from the body.

Lowering The Risk of Osteoporosis

If you don't have osteoporosis the following steps may help prevent it. If you have osteoporosis the same steps may help slow down further bone loss.

- **Eat foods rich in calcium.**

Bones are a calcium “bank” for the rest of the body. Bones may seem unchanging but they are changing all the time. Bones are constantly being broken down and rebuilt. This means your need for calcium never ends.

Bones release calcium when the body needs it and they absorb calcium to rebuild and strengthen themselves. If there is not enough calcium in your diet the body will pull more calcium out of the bones than they put back.

Over time, if too much calcium is pulled from your bones they will become porous and weak. If you eat enough calcium rich foods your body will not have to pull as much calcium from the bones.

- **Eat a healthy diet.**

In addition to calcium your body needs many other nutrients including vitamin D,

vitamin C, folate, protein, phosphorous, zinc, copper, magnesium, fluoride and boron to build healthy bones. Vitamin D is very important because it helps your body use calcium.

A well balanced diet based on the USDA MyPlate Plan is your best guide to a healthy diet. Following the USDA MyPlate Plan can help you get all the nutrients you need and in the proper amounts.

- **Be physically active.**

Not being physically active can cause bone loss. Regular physical activity can help build and strengthen your bones.

Weight bearing activity can particularly help strengthen and promote new bone growth. Some weight-bearing activities are weight-lifting, walking, jogging, aerobics, hiking, and racquet sports.

- **Stop smoking. Smoking can increase bone loss.**

- **Do not use alcohol in excess. Too much alcohol can lower calcium absorption.**

- **If you have osteoporosis talk to your doctor about medicines that can help build bone.**

Sources

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