

[IMAGE]

Keep Your Bones Healthy

By Julie T. Chen, MD

Many of us don't think about our bones until we are in our later years in life. But, the factors that contribute to keeping our bones healthy need to be addressed earlier in life. So, the goal of this article is to get you thinking about your bones many years before it even becomes something you need to think about.

Our bone health is dependent heavily on our diet and our activity level. Another factor that affects our bones is also what medications we take. Let's talk a bit more about these three factors.

The fundamental building blocks for our bones are found in the minerals and vitamins we get from our foods. Now, if your diet is mostly consisting of fast food and days may go by where you haven't eaten a vegetable, then we're going to have a problem. Many junk foods actually cause our bones to leak out nutrients and make our bones brittle and unhealthy. The foods you want to focus on eating are vegetables and fruits, nuts, beans, lean healthy proteins and whole grains. These major food groups consist of various vitamins and minerals essential to the building of bones and the maintenance of strong bone architecture. It would be ideal to eat these foods in their natural states instead of from a box or can or wrapper where it's been processed. Processed foods tend to have less nutrients since you lose some through processing of these foods from their natural states into the packaged processed states.

bone - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark I'm sure you've heard of "weight-bearing exercises" in terms of osteoporosis and osteopenia. When people have gotten to the point of losing bone mass, most doctors will talk about having the person do "weight-bearing exercises" to help build bones. How about instead of waiting until you need it because you've already loss some bone mass, let's have you do these exercises early on in life so as to prevent bone loss.

What exactly is "weight-bearing exercises?" Let's keep this simple and I'll just list out the top couple activities that achieve this. Weight training or circuit training will achieve this. So will walking, running, dancing, and doing sports activities like basketball, volleyball and football since all of these are going to incorporate walking and running. Most activities where you will be loading weight onto your body or "pounding the pavement" per se will do it.

Now that we've addressed the factors that help with bone building, let's talk about the factor that inhibits that. Various medications seem to not be so bone healthy. The only way to make sure you are not causing harm to your bones through your medications is to speak with your doctor or pharmacist about your medications and see if any may be impeding bone growth and maintenance. If you are on some, you need to have a discussion with your doctor about the pros and cons about being on that drug. If the benefits outweigh the risks, then you need to stay on it. If a drug isn't absolutely essential but may be hurting your bone health, you may be able to come to an alternative option with your doctor about what to use instead of the drug you are currently on. The most important thing is not to take yourself off or put yourself on any drugs without physician's guidance. You don't want to save your bones but harm other aspects of your health, so be sure to make your medication decisions together with your physician and not on your own. Finally, having your doctor check your calcium and vitamin D regularly is a sure bet in helping your bone health. When it comes down to keeping your bones healthy, the most important things you can do for yourself are the things you should do for all your other health concerns: eat healthy, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, manage your stress, and make sure your medications are helping you more than they are harming you.

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