

[IMAGE]

Arming Yourself Against Osteoporosis

As women age, a common problem they face is thinning of the bones - also called osteoporosis. Bone mineral density, or BMD, is a measure of bone strength related to fracture risk and the weight-bearing capacity of the skeleton. Eating calcium is recommended to maintain bone strength; are there other nutrients women need for strong bones?

To determine the association between total, animal, and vegetable protein consumption in those 55 years or older, the authors of a recent study in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* administered a diet questionnaire to almost 600 women and 400 men. These individuals, all residents of the Rancho Bernardo senior living community in California, were also examined to determine bone density initially and four years later.

For women, eating higher amounts of animal protein (e.g., meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products) was related to increased bone density. The added bone strength from consuming more animal protein was more dramatic in women who had less calcium in their diets. In both men and women, eating more vegetable protein (e.g., soy or beans and rice) was linked to lower bone density, however.

This information does not imply that you shouldn't be a vegetarian or eat soy products. The study does suggest, however, that if you don't regularly eat meat, be sure to eat enough protein and include additional calcium in your diet. Protein is by itself a critical component of bones, making up a quarter of their total mass and roughly half of their volume.

Reference:

Promislow JHE, Goodman-Gruen D, Slymen DJ, et al. Protein consumption and bone mineral density in the elderly: The Rancho Bernardo Study. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2002;155(7), pp. 636-644.

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