

Osteoporosis Prevention Choices You Can Start Making Today

From exercise to diet, find out how you can reduce your risk of osteoporosis.

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You can reduce your risk of **osteoporosis** by making several changes in your lifestyle. Osteoporosis prevention relies primarily on a healthy, calcium-rich diet, adequate vitamin D intake, weight-bearing exercise, and other healthy habits. Making the right choices now can significantly impact your level of osteoporosis risk later in life.

“*Prevention* is the key word that we don’t say enough. We talk about what needs to be done once someone has been identified to be in an early stage of the disease. Folks need to be very conscious of their own behaviors,” advises Lenard Kaye, PhD, director of the University of Maine Center on Aging. Kaye and his colleagues recently completed a series of national focus groups with women and health professionals to assess priorities and awareness surrounding osteoporosis prevention and management. He highlights several lifestyle choices that have been shown to help reduce the risk of bone loss and osteoporosis:

- 1. Increase your calcium intake.** Both calcium and vitamin D are essential for bone health. You can make sure that you're getting the daily recommended doses of each by taking a **daily calcium supplement** — adults require about 1,000 mg of calcium per day — and by getting 15 minutes of sunlight (since vitamin D is made naturally in the body during sunlight exposure). Vitamin D supplements of 400 IU can also help with calcium absorption.
- 2. Engage in weight-bearing exercise.** “The importance of **weight-bearing exercise** in osteoporosis prevention can’t be overstated. We recommend beginning early,” says Kaye. Regularly engaging in weight-bearing exercises, like running, walking, strength training, aerobics, jumping rope, and yoga — anything that requires your bones to support your weight — will help strengthen the integrity of your bones.

3. Revamp your diet. Calcium, vitamin D, and magnesium are important, but you also need to have the energy and ability to remain active. Kaye says this means that for some women, a low-calorie diet may be needed to control obesity so they can be active and engaged. A diet high in salt or caffeine may also contribute to bone loss. Talk to your doctor or a dietitian if you are not sure about the overall quality of your diet.

4. Maintain a healthy body weight. Your bones have the best shot at long-term health if you are neither over- nor underweight.

5. Toss the soda. Carbonated beverages have been shown to contribute to bone loss. This may be because the carbonation affects calcium levels in bones, or it may be because if you are drinking soda or sparkling water, you are not drinking a more nutritious beverage such as milk or fortified orange juice, which can help build stronger bones.

6. Stop smoking. There is an association between smoking and an increased risk of osteoporosis.

7. Monitor your alcohol intake. While some studies suggest that the occasional glass of wine could strengthen bones, alcohol abuse has been shown to contribute to bone loss. Women should have no more than one alcoholic drink a day and men should limit themselves to two drinks.

8. Talk to your doctor about medications that might negatively affect your bones. If you are taking corticosteroids long-term for asthma or an autoimmune condition such as lupus or rheumatoid arthritis, talk to your doctor about what you can do to protect your bones from the **negative side effects** of these medications.

9. Get screened. If you believe that you are at risk for osteoporosis, talk to your doctor or nurse about getting a **bone density screening**. The majority of health plans pay for these tests, which are not invasive, lengthy, or painful.

“Some folks have a rather pessimistic view of osteoporosis and other conditions. They either have the fatalistic view that it’s unavoidable or they continue to delude themselves into thinking they are invincible. Either perspective is flawed. What you want is for people to take on a realistic view of themselves and their capacity to prevent a wide range of chronic illnesses,” says Kaye, and osteoporosis is no exception.

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