

# Bone Health Basics

**Optimal bone health is the foundation of your overall health and quality of life. Making it a priority is not very difficult. Discover a few secrets for strong bones.**

Worldwide, one in five men and one in three women over 50 will break a bone due to low bone density and even worse, one in five will die following a bone fracture.<sup>1</sup> Optimal bone health is the foundation for your overall health and quality of life. Luckily, making bone health a priority is not too difficult - when you know how.

## Essential bone functions: why bone health is crucial

There are 206 bones of the adult human skeleton, upon which all the soft tissues rest. Bones, working with muscles, joints, tendons, blood vessels and nerves help your body move, allowing you to accomplish daily activities and the enjoyable pursuits of life. Your bone structure protects vital organs such as the brain, lungs, and heart, and stores minerals your body needs.

## Risk factors for low bone density

The following characteristics may make you more likely to have low bone mass.<sup>2</sup> Some are out of your control, but others you can avoid with proper lifestyle choices:

- Female gender
- Age
- Family history
- Ethnicity  
(Asians and Caucasians are most at risk)
- Medications  
(like corticosteroids)
- Lack of exercise
- Being underweight  
(poor diet or anorexia)
- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Medical conditions  
(like thyroid disease, diabetes, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and more)

## Things that may help strengthen bones, avoid injury and maintain bone health

- **Exercising with weights:** You don't need to be a professional weight lifter to protect your bones. Even walking counts as a weight-bearing exercise.
- **Eating a healthy diet:** Calcium-rich foods build bone and vitamin D aids in calcium absorption.<sup>2</sup> It's preferable to get these nutrients from a bone-healthy diet, but supplements help if your doctor feels they are appropriate.<sup>3</sup> Minerals like magnesium and zinc are also important, and include fatty fish (like salmon) or take omega-3 supplements, in consultation with your doctor.
- **Having regular health checkups:** Physical exams help your doctor discover any bone-threatening health problems early, when they are most treatable.
- **Scheduling a bone density test:** If your doctor recommends it, this non-invasive, painless radiology test can help catch low bone density early and measure your risk of developing osteoporosis. For seniors or disabled individuals receiving the benefit, Medicare covers bone mass measurement when medically necessary.<sup>4</sup>

- **Reducing fracture risks at home:** Help avoid accidental falls and injuries by installing shower grab bars and other home safety features.<sup>5</sup>
- **Carefully managing medications:** Work with your doctor to limit dosage and number of refills for sedating medication or painkillers, which can affect your balance and lead to falls.

## Consequences of poor bone health

Poor bone strength can lead to osteoporosis and frailty that can seriously limit your mobility and even shorten your life.<sup>6</sup> Strong bones, on the other hand, might help reduce potential fractures and can contribute to mobility and activity level. Staying active may help you combat or recover from other potential health issues as well.

### References

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