

## **KEEP AGING BONES FIT & HEALTHY**

When your children were young you probably encouraged them to drink their milk so they'd have strong bones when they grew up. Now that your mother is getting older you can help her maintain healthy bones and prevent serious fractures.

Although most people think of the skeleton as a framework, bone is living tissue composed primarily of protein and calcium. Like skin and other body tissues, old bone is continually replaced by new bone throughout your life.

Bone loss is a normal part of the aging process. By the time a woman is 25 her skeleton will have reached its maximum amount of bony tissue. After age 35 the loss of old bone begins to be greater than the growth of new bone, increasing the risk of fractures...

If a woman loses too much bone she can develop osteoporosis – a condition that causes bones to become thinner, fragile, and more easily broken. Because bone loss happens gradually, a broken wrist or hip is often the first sign of osteoporosis. Osteoporosis also causes spinal fractures when weak bones in the back are compressed by the weight of the body.

Osteoporosis is a serious condition in older adults. Hip fractures are the leading cause of hospitalization in older adults. Many people who have broken a hip will enter a nursing home either as a permanent resident or for rehabilitation. Twelve percent of those who suffer a hip fracture will die from pneumonia or other complications.

### **SYMPTOMS**

Osteoporosis occurs more often in women after menopause although older men can also develop the disease. Most women don't know they have it when the disease is in its early stages. The first signs of bone loss include:

- Loose teeth or gum disease if a woman is losing bone in her jaw.
- Loss of height, a rounded upper back, or stooped posture.
- Fractures especially of the wrist, vertebrae, or hips.
- Back pain.

### **RISK FACTORS**

Heredity is a major factor in the development of osteoporosis. If your mother remembers that her mother, aunt or a sister had a stooped posture – sometimes called a “dowager's hump” – she may also be at risk for developing osteoporosis.

Other risk factors include:

- Short or small-boned women have less bone mass and are more likely to be affected by bone loss.
- Early menopause may increase the risk of osteoporosis. The female hormone estrogen may protect women from abnormal loss of bone tissue. After menopause, when estrogen levels decrease, a woman's risk for bone loss increases.

- Certain drugs prescribed for arthritis, asthma, inflammatory bowel disease, thyroid disorders and cancer can cause bone loss especially if the drugs are taken in high doses or for a long time.
- Age, smoking; drinking large amounts of alcohol, coffee, tea or other drinks with caffeine, lack of exercise may cause bone loss.
- White or Asian women are at greater risk for osteoporosis than African American or Hispanic women.
- Low intake of calcium from food or supplements.

## **DIAGNOSING OSTEOPOROSIS**

The National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends that women over 65 have a bone mineral density test – a painless 30-minute scanning procedure that measures the density of bones in the spine, hip and wrist. Medicare covers the cost of the test which should be repeated every two years.

## **KEYS TO BONE HEALTH**

**DIET:** Make sure your mother gets enough calcium in her diet – 1,000 to 1,500 milligrams per day are recommended. Good sources of calcium include:

- 1 cup whole milk – 291 mg.
- 1 cup skim milk – 302 mg
- 1 cup plain yogurt - 415 mg
- 1 ounce Muenster cheese – 203 mg
- 1 cup vanilla ice cream – 176 mg
- 3 oz canned pink salmon with bones – 167 mg.
- 1 cup collard greens – 357 mg.
- 1 cup broccoli – 180 mg.
- 1 cup cottage cheese – 140 mg

If it is hard for her to get enough calcium from food, suggest that she take a calcium supplement. Ask her doctor or pharmacist for recommendations.

**EXERCISE:** Stick to activities that your mother enjoys and that increase bone and muscle tissue. You can encourage her to get moving if you work out together. Walking, stretching, strength training with weights or resistance bands, tai chi, and dancing to “oldies” tunes are other good choices.

**MEDICATIONS:** Several oral and injectable drugs are available to stop bone loss, reduce the risk of fractures, and help the body rebuild bone. Some of these medicines have significant side effects and may not be right for all women. You and your parent should work with her doctor to find the best medication to maintain healthy bones with the fewest side effects.

## **MANAGING OSTEOPOROSIS -- A FAMILY AFFAIR!**

Osteoporosis is a serious condition and a significant cause of disability and injury in older women. A variety of medical treatments are available that reduce bone loss, prevent broken bones caused by the disease and increase bone health. Lifestyle changes are also important to maintain the health of your older relative and many of these will benefit the rest of your family too.

### **RESOURCES**

For more information on osteoporosis visit these websites:

- National Osteoporosis Foundation [www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)
- National Institutes of Health Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases-National Resource Center [www.niams.nih.gov/bone](http://www.niams.nih.gov/bone)
- International Osteoporosis Foundation [www.iofbonehealth.org](http://www.iofbonehealth.org)