

Healthy bones for everybody

The Health Column

10 Aug
2016

Bone health is important at any age, but if you're over 50 it's a priority. Both family history and lifestyle factors have an effect on bone health, and so it is important to make bone health a priority in your life.

Over 6 million Australians have low bone density. The burden of poor bone health is enormous both in terms of its impact on quality of life and costs to the health care system.



- One in three Australians have poor bone health
- In Australia there is currently 1 bone broken every 3.6 minutes due to poor bone health. That's 395 broken bones per day. By 2022 there will be 1 fracture every 2.9 minutes.
- One in three people with osteoporosis are men. Over 1 million Australians are affected by osteoporosis and a further 6.3 million people have low bone density.

Our bones support us and allow us to move. They protect our brain, heart, and other organs from injury. Our bones also store minerals such as calcium and phosphorous, which help keep our bones strong, and release them into the body when we need them for other uses. There are many things we can do to keep our bones healthy and strong. Eating foods rich in calcium and vitamin D, getting plenty of exercise, and having good health habits help keep our bones healthy.

Good bone health is dependent on three key elements:

- **CALCIUM** - Calcium is the major building block for bones. It is deposited as a crystal onto our bones and gives them their hard strength. Bone also acts as a storage bank for calcium so when we don't get enough calcium in our diets, the body will take the calcium it needs from our bones to use for other important functions. If it is not replaced our bones will become porous and lose their strength. That's why it's so important to have a daily supply of calcium, throughout our lives. Different ages, genders and stages of life require different amounts of calcium.
- **EXERCISE** - As a rule of thumb, 30 minutes of bone building exercise 4-6 times a week can help maintain better bone density.

- **SUNSHINE** - In summer, for moderately fair-skinned people, a walk with arms exposed for 5–10 minutes mid-morning or mid-afternoon is beneficial for vitamin D production. In winter, the same moderately fair skinned person needs to be exposed for longer, so the recommendation is 7–30 minutes at noon.

You must do all three on a regular basis to maximize your bone health.

Osteoporosis is a National Health Priority that affects more than 1.2 million Australians. It is a condition in which bones lose calcium and other minerals, becoming fragile and brittle, which leads to a higher risk of fractures. Anyone who experiences a fracture following a minor bump or fall and is 50 years or over should be investigated for osteoporosis. It can be treated and in many cases prevented. Awareness and prevention is extremely important and continued research is necessary. There are many things that can increase your chances of getting osteoporosis. These are called “risk factors.” Some risk factors you can control e.g. diet, physical activity, body weight, smoking, alcohol and certain medicines and diseases (e.g. glucocorticoids, cancers etc.) Then there are some things which are outside of your control such as age, gender, ethnicity and family history.

Healthy Bones Australia is a national public awareness program with a key focus on prevention. The aim of this program is to improve the bone health of all Australians, and to help everyone lead a fit and active lifestyle throughout their life. The program requires Australians to understand and actively embrace their bone health at every age. Bones are at their maximum density around the age of 20, hence it’s important to make sure they reach their capacity during childhood and continue to stay strong through to old age.

Your local pharmacy can help too. It is important to talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your bone health. If they feel that you are at risk for osteoporosis, they may order a bone density test. A bone density test measures how strong or dense your bones are and whether you have osteoporosis. It can also tell you what your chances are of breaking a bone. Bone density tests are quick, safe, and painless. Pharmacies also offer services which can help people living with bone health issues. Visit your local pharmacy and find out how they can help.

In addition, you can get more information on bone health from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia’s Self Care health information. Self Care Fact Cards available from these pharmacies include topics such as *Osteoporosis*, *Weight and health*, *Menopause* and *Smoking and alcohol*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772.