

# Healthy bones for everybody

## *The Health Column*

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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. 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:



- Over 1 million Australians are affected by osteoporosis.
- Over 6 million Australians have low bone density, which is a possible precursor to osteoporosis.
- One in three Australians has poor bone health.
- In Australia there is currently one bone broken every 3.6 minutes due to poor bone health. That's 395 broken bones per day. By 2022 there will be one fracture every 2.9 minutes.
- One in three people with osteoporosis are men.

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.

### Tips for healthy bone health

Good bone health is dependent on three key elements:

- **Calcium:** this is the major building block for bones. It is deposited as a crystal onto our bones and gives them their strength. Bone 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.

More than half of all Australian adults do not meet their recommended daily intake for calcium. Different ages, genders and stages of life require different amounts of calcium.

Eat foods that contribute to supporting healthy bones and that are rich in calcium, vitamin C, vitamin K, vitamin D, potassium and magnesium. Top choices are:- dairy products or calcium fortified soy milk, almond milk, coconut milk and some grains; dark green leafy vegetables, sweet potato, citrus fruit and fruits such as figs and plums, nuts such as almonds, and fatty fish like sardines or salmon.

- **Exercise:** As a rule of thumb, 30 minutes of -(weight bearing) exercise 4-6 times a week can help maintain better bone density. Exercise is important for everyone, and helps build stronger, denser bones.
- **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.

These three elements need to be adopted on a regular basis to maximise your bone health.

Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions (which includes osteoporosis) have been identified as an Australian National Health Priority Area. This means that these conditions are seen to contribute significantly to disease burden in Australia, and there is potential to improve health in this area. Osteoporosis is a condition in which bones lose calcium and other minerals, so that they become fragile and brittle. This 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. In many cases osteoporosis can be prevented. Treatment is available for those diagnosed with osteoporosis to help strengthen bones.

Awareness and prevention is extremely important and continued research is necessary. There are a number of risk factors that can make someone more likely to develop osteoporosis. Some of these risk factors include: a family history of osteoporosis, low calcium intake, low vitamin D levels, and certain medical conditions or medicines. Lifestyle factors such as smoking, a low level of physical activity, and excess alcohol consumption can also affect your risk. Talk to your pharmacist about your individual situation and whether you have any risk factors for developing osteoporosis.

Healthy Bones Australia ([www.healthybonesaustralia.org.au](http://www.healthybonesaustralia.org.au)) 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. Healthy Bones Australia would like all Australians to understand and actively embrace their bone health at every age. Bones are at their maximum density around the age of 20, therefore it's important to make sure they reach their capacity during childhood and continue to stay strong through to old age.

Talk to your friendly local pharmacist or the helpful staff at your pharmacy who can offer services that assist people living with bone health issues.

It is important to talk to your doctor or pharmacist (and nutritionist or dietitian?) about your bone health. Sometimes, a bone density test may be ordered. This test measures how strong or dense your bones are and whether you have osteoporosis or osteopenia (a milder form of bone density

loss). It can also tell you what your chances are of breaking a bone. Bone density tests are safe and painless.

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 titles such as *Osteoporosis*, *Weight and health*, *Menopause*, *Smoking* and *Alcohol*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to [www.psa.org.au/selfcare](http://www.psa.org.au/selfcare), then click 'Find a *Self care pharmacy* near you'.