

May is Osteoporosis Awareness Month



Got milk? You're probably familiar with this advertising slogan, but it really is a legitimate question to ask yourself if you're consuming enough milk and other dietary sources of calcium to keep your bones strong and reduce the risk of osteoporosis as you age. Adult bone mass peaks at about age 30 for women. With aging, bone gradually begins to lose calcium and this process accelerates after menopause. So it is important for young women to build a good bone mass foundation and for older women to do whatever they can to maintain it. You can help increase bone strength by making sure that you have enough calcium, vitamin D, and weight-bearing exercise in your daily routine.

Adults under the age of 50 need 1,000 milligrams of calcium a day, while those over the age of 50 need 1,200 milligrams a day. If you already eat several servings of calcium-rich foods such as skim milk, yogurt, low-fat cheese, almonds, sardines, or calcium-fortified orange juice, you may be getting what you need in your diet without the need for additional calcium supplements. Green leafy vegetables such as kale and collard greens, along with legumes and seeds, can also contribute small amounts of calcium to your diet. Calcium intake should be limited to 1500 mg per day to avoid getting kidney stones.

The following items should be limited as they can reduce calcium absorption:

- Antacids (you need stomach acid to aid in calcium absorption)
- Excessive alcohol
- Caffeinated beverages such as coffee and tea
- Excess sodium
- Carbonated beverages containing phosphorus
- Excessive red meat

If you are unable to meet your calcium needs with dietary sources, talk with your physician about a calcium supplement. Calcium citrate is better absorbed than carbonate. Take no more than 500 or 600 milligrams of calcium at one time to allow for better absorption. Ask your physician to check your Vitamin D levels to determine if you need a supplement because Vitamin D helps with calcium absorption. You can meet your Vitamin D needs by getting about 15 minutes of direct sunlight on exposed skin 3 or more times a week, however, living in a colder climate like Wisconsin for half the year decreases our chances of getting adequate skin exposure to the sun.

Are you at risk for osteoporosis? The National Osteoporosis Foundation lists these risk factors:

- **Age.** The older you are, the greater your risk of osteoporosis as your bones become weaker and less dense as you age.
- **Gender.** Men can develop osteoporosis, but the condition is more common in women because of bone loss due to estrogen loss after menopause.
- **Family/Personal History.** If your mother has a history of vertebral fractures or if you've suffered a fracture yourself as an adult, your risk is greater for future fractures.
- **Race.** White and Asian women are more likely to develop osteoporosis than African-American and Hispanic women.
- **Bone Structure and Body Weight** <<http://www.webmd.com/diet/tc/healthy-weight-what-is-a-healthy-weight>> . If you're small-boned and thin (under 127 pounds), you're at greater risk for osteoporosis.
- **Menopause/Menstrual History.** Normal or early menopause (brought about naturally or surgically) increases your chances of developing osteoporosis. Women with amenorrhea due to eating disorders or excessive physical exercise, may also lose bone tissue and develop osteoporosis.
- **Lifestyle.** Cigarette smoking, excessive alcohol intake, inadequate calcium intake, or getting little or no weight-bearing exercise increases your chances of developing osteoporosis.
- **Medications /Chronic Diseases.** Certain medications used to treat chronic medical conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, hyperthyroidism, seizure disorders, and gastrointestinal diseases may have side effects that can damage bone and lead to osteoporosis.

If you are over the age of 50 and have any of the risk factors listed above, talk with your physician about getting a bone density test to determine if you need additional treatment to prevent or slow the progression of bone loss. Osteoporosis can be a very debilitating disease because it increases your risk for falls and fractures which can limit your ability to move around independently as you age.

Source: *National Osteoporosis Foundation*

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