



Nutrition – eat right for your bones

Good nutrition is a key element in maintaining good bone health. By eating a balanced nutritious diet that includes adequate protein and calcium, getting some sunlight to keep your vitamin D levels up, and maintaining a healthy body weight, you can lower your risk of developing osteoporosis. Other lifestyle factors that are important for bone health are moderation of alcohol intake, not smoking and maintaining regular safe physical activity.

Maintaining a healthy body weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the most important steps for bone health. In older adults, a BMI of 20–25 is recommended. Being underweight (e.g., women under 55 kg, men under 60–65 kg) increases risk of low bone density and fractures. Healthy body weight supports hormones and growth factors that strengthen bones. However, obesity may reduce benefits due to higher diabetes risk, falls, and some obesity-related fractures.

Protein and Bone Health

Protein is essential for maintaining strong bones and muscles. It provides the building blocks for bone tissue and supports muscle strength, which helps prevent falls and fractures. Older adults, in particular, benefit from including good-quality protein sources—such as dairy products, eggs, lean meat, fish, legumes, nuts, and seeds—in every meal. Adequate protein intake also enhances the effectiveness of calcium and vitamin D in supporting bone health.

Calcium and Bone Health

There has been much debate about the ideal calcium intake for preventing osteoporosis. Early studies suggested that consuming around 1500 mg per day might stop bone loss, but newer research using precise bone density measurements has shown this is not the case. Long-term studies in Auckland found that bone loss in older adults was similar across



a wide range of calcium intakes (300–2000 mg/day). Clinical trials have also shown that calcium supplements do not reduce fracture risk. For most people, a calcium intake above 500 mg per day—roughly two servings of dairy products—is sufficient when combined with a balanced diet. Routine calcium supplementation is not recommended for osteoporosis prevention. This is consistent with evidence from many clinical trials indicating that using calcium supplements does not reduce the number of fractures that occur. Accordingly, we currently recommend that people should not use calcium supplements to prevent osteoporosis but should maintain a calcium intake above 500 mg/day, which is equivalent to about two servings of dairy products.

Vitamin D

Low levels of vitamin D reduce the body's ability to absorb calcium from the diet, and in extreme cases can result in under-mineralisation of the skeleton. It has also been linked with prevention of muscle weakness, which is important for avoiding falls. Fortunately, regular exposure to small amounts of sunshine can prevent vitamin D deficiency. For those who are unable to expose their skin to sunshine, such as those who are veiled, unwell, frail or elderly – as well as individuals with very dark skin – a low dose Vitamin D supplement can be taken.

Know Your Bones.™ Visit osteoporosis.org.nz/take-the-test

Complete the online bone health assessment and you'll receive a personalised report explaining your risk of fracture and recommendations for better bone health.

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