

Your Health: Calcium supplements alone may not be enough to prevent bone loss

by *Rallie_McAllister*

Osteoporosis is not a normal part of aging and, in many cases, is entirely preventable.

If you're determined to protect the health of your bones, you may be taking a calcium supplement. That's definitely a step in the right direction, but recent research suggests that optimum bone health depends on a number of factors in addition to boosting calcium intake. One of those factors is vitamin D.

In the absence of this nutrient, only about 10 percent to 15 percent of dietary calcium is absorbed by the body. The results of a recent study revealed that adults over the age of 50 who regularly took calcium supplements plus vitamin D enjoyed significant reductions in the risk of suffering bone fractures compared to those who took calcium alone.

For the study, scientists at the University of Western Sydney in Australia analyzed data collected from over 63,000 men and women. The researchers found that when it comes to taking bone-building supplements, persistence pays.

Adults who took the calcium and vitamin D supplements at least 80 percent of the time experienced a 24 percent reduction in the risk of suffering a broken bone. This benefit was reduced by half among folks who took a hit-or-miss approach to their supplementation regimens.

Based on their findings, the Australian scientists determined that daily doses of at least 1,200 milligrams of calcium with 800 international units of vitamin D provided the greatest therapeutic effects. The results of the study also highlight the importance of starting supplementation by the age of 50, when bone mineral loss begins to accelerate.

In addition to calcium and vitamin D, vitamin B12 is a critical factor in promoting bone health. Scientists at the University of California, San Francisco found that older women with low blood levels of B12 experienced significantly faster bone loss compared to those with higher levels of the nutrient.

Although vitamin and mineral supplements can boost bone health, nothing can take the place of a wholesome, nutritious diet. The typical American fare, rich in protein, refined cereal grains and sodas, can produce an excess of acid in the body.

To neutralize the acids, bones are broken down to release calcium into the bloodstream. Over time, this

process can lead to significant reductions in bone mass and increase the risk of fractures.

Consumption of fruits and vegetables has been found to have a beneficial buffering effect. When these foods are metabolized, they add bicarbonate, an alkaline compound, to the body.

Researchers at Tufts University in Boston recently reported that increasing the alkali content of the diet can help reduce bone loss in healthy older adults by slowing bone breakdown and reducing calcium excretion from the body.

While you're adding more fruits and veggies to your diet, it may be wise to cut back on the colas. Cola beverages, including those that are sugar-free and decaffeinated, typically contain phosphoric acid, an ingredient that appears to promote bone breakdown.

The results of a study published in the January 2009 issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition revealed that cola consumption can contribute to bone loss in women. Investigators found that the more cola women drank, the lower their bone mineral density and the greater their risk for osteoporosis.

Losing excess weight can improve your overall health, but it's important to make sure you're not losing valuable bone mass in the process. Rapid weight loss achieved by dramatic reductions in calorie consumption has been shown to accelerate bone breakdown and can permanently weaken the skeletal system.

Stepping up your level of physical activity and making modest reductions in caloric intake may be the best way to protect bone health while slimming down. Regular weight-bearing exercise, including walking, dancing or strength training, is known to stimulate bone formation and reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

Although osteoporosis was once considered to be a woman's disease, it is becoming increasingly prevalent in men. Research suggests that as many as half of all women and a quarter of men over the age of 50 will experience at least one osteoporosis-related bone fracture.

According to the results of a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, even minor fractures can double or triple the risk of dying among people over the age of 60.

Osteoporosis isn't inevitable. Taking a few simple measures to protect your bones today can yield tremendous rewards in terms of your future health.

Rallie McAllister is a board-certified family physician, speaker and the author of several books, including "Healthy Lunchbox: The Working Mom's Guide to Keeping You and Your Kids Trim."

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