

Do the best by your bones: Preventing osteoporosis



Bones are living tissue – from birth, the skeleton continues to grow to the end of the teenage years, reaching a maximum strength and size (peak bone mass) around the mid-20s.

After this, the rate at which bone forms is often slower than the rate at which it is removed.

While there are some risk factors for bone loss that you can't control – such as your age and family history – there are important lifestyle changes you can make to preserve bone health throughout your life.

Here are some ways you can maintain your skeleton and reduce your risk of osteoporosis:

- **Perform regular weight bearing exercise** Ideally, you should aim to do at least 30 minutes of weight bearing physical activity every day. The best exercises for your bones are ones that work your muscles against gravity, where you are on your feet and bear your own weight: (for example walking, jogging, tennis, dancing, skipping) or resistance training which becomes more challenging over time (such as lifting weights or using gym equipment).
- **Maintain a healthy weight (BMI 20-25)** Being underweight can increase your fracture risk significantly.
- **Eat a balanced diet** Ensure you eat a nutritious diet with adequate calcium intake. Try to eat 2-3 servings of calcium-rich foods each day: for example dairy products (milk, yoghurt), calcium-rich vegetables (broccoli, silverbeet), tinned sardines/salmon (including the bones), and calcium-rich nuts (almonds, Brazil nuts). Avoid food exclusion or severe weight-loss diets.
- **Avoid or stop smoking** Smoking has been shown to raise your risk of fracture significantly.
- **Limit alcohol** While a glass or two of wine or beer won't impact on your bone health, more than two units of alcohol per day can raise your fracture risk. Aim to have at least two alcohol-free days each week.
- **Get adequate sun exposure** Vitamin D, which is naturally created when the skin is exposed to sunlight, is essential for calcium absorption from the diet, bone development, control of cell growth, and immune functioning. It has also been linked to the prevention of muscle weakness, which is important for preventing falls.

Making these changes can be very beneficial to your bone health. However, if you're over 50 and have broken a bone after a minor fall or bump, or you are concerned that you have some of these risk factors please complete the Know Your Bones tool and show it to your doctor or healthcare provider.

Know Your Bones™

Visit bones.org.nz/knowyourbones to complete an online bone health assessment - you'll get a personalised report explaining your risk of fracture and osteoporosis, plus recommendations for better bone health.

Please share this fact sheet with friends and family if you think it would be useful to them, and encourage them to email join@bones.org.nz to receive more information and updates.