

Bone Health

Sticks and Stones Won't Break these Bones

*Early Intervention Program
Nova Scotia Teachers Union*



Did you know that as many as 2 millions Canadians suffer with osteoporosis...this number is staggering! One in four over the age of 50 will be diagnosed. But it is not only women who get osteoporosis, 1 in 8 men of the same age are afflicted in Canada.

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes your bones to

become weak and brittle, increasing the risk of fracture. Osteoporosis is characterized by low bone mass. It is known as the "silent thief" because the bone loss develops slowly, without pain or noticeable symptoms. In many instances, an individual may not realize they suffer from the condition. Often the first sign is a broken bone. The

most common breaks resulting from osteoporosis include the spine, hip and wrist.

There are a number of factors that can increase the likelihood that you will develop osteoporosis. It is important to know the risk factors, as some you can change, so that you can proactively manage your bone health.

Risk factors you can change:

- **Low calcium intake** over a lifetime contributes to diminished bone density, early bone loss and an increased risk of fractures.
- **Tobacco use** contributes to weak bones.
- **Eating disorders** such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia increase risk of low bone density.
- **Sedentary lifestyle** increases risk. Weight bearing activity, particularly walking, running, jumping, dancing and weight lifting are especially beneficial for your bones.
- **Excessive alcohol consumption.** Consuming more than two drinks per day can decrease bone formation and interfere with the body's ability to absorb calcium.
- **Corticosteroid medication** long term use is damaging to the bones. If you need to take such medications long term for a chronic condition, your doctor can monitor your bone density and recommend other medications to help prevent bone loss.

To learn more about osteoporosis and additional details on how to ensure good bone health, please visit:
www.healthandbone.ca

Risk factors you can't change:



- **Gender** - almost twice as common in women compared to men
- **Age** - risk increases with age
- **Race** - White or Asian decent are at greatest risk.
- **Family history** - having a parent or sibling with osteoporosis increases your risk.
- **Frame size** - exceptionally thin men and women or small body frames tend to have increased risk as there is less bone mass to draw from as the individual ages.
- **Thyroid hormone** - An overactive thyroid or taking excessive amounts of thyroid hormone to treat an underactive thyroid can cause bone loss.

The more risk factors you have, the greater your chances of developing Osteoporosis. Although some risk factors are beyond your control, there are several that are related to lifestyle and are modifiable. These are the ones you can change to improve your bone health and lower your risk of developing osteoporosis. You should speak to your doctor to discuss what your risk is and

what treatment options are available to you to ensure the best possible bone health. Whether or not you are at high risk for osteoporosis, it is never too late to incorporate changes to your lifestyle to keep your bones healthy.

Measures you can take to manage this condition and to protect your bones and promote healthy living include:

- **Medication** to treat osteoporosis and protect your bones from fractures
- **Proper nutrition** like intake of vitamin D and calcium are important to help nurture healthy bones. Eating foods that are rich in these nutrients is helpful in maintaining and improving bone health. Other dietary measures you can take include eating leafy greens, rich in vitamin K. Reduce salt in your diet as excess causes calcium to be excreted from the body. Curb caffeine as this can lead to increased calcium excretion. Avoid soft drinks (diet and regular) as these contain phosphoric acid, a flavour additive and preservative that can cause bone weakness. Avoid crash dieting.
- **Exercise** helps build strong bones and maintain bone density. Ideally, an exercise program should include weight bearing and strength training exercises. Weight bearing exercises such as walking and jogging help maintain bone density in your legs, hips and lower spine. Strength training helps to improve strength in her upper body such as the arms and upper spine.

- **Healthy Lifestyle** is important to maintain such as refraining from smoking and controlling your intake of alcohol.
- **Fall prevention** can ensure you are protected from a break in a bone that could cause serious consequences. Fall proof your house to protect your bones. Measures you can take include keeping hallways clear and free from clutter and obstacles, placing a non slip pad under all area rugs, anchoring electrical cords close to the wall and ensuring no loose extensions. Wooden stair cases should have a carpet runner which is securely fastened for traction. Ensure a sturdy handrail for stairwells. In the kitchen, wipe up any spills immediately and use a sturdy step stool (not a chair) when accessing high cupboards. In the bathroom, use a non slip bathmat by the sink and shower to absorb water splashes and use a rubber mat or slip resilient decals in the bathtub. Finally outdoors, ensure appropriate lighting at all entrances to your home. Handrails alongside stairs need to be sturdy and in good repair. In the winter, maintain a clear driveway with shovelled and salted entrances.