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MONTHLY TOPIC



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build strong bones

THE NATURAL WAY



Osteoporosis is a condition where the bones become weak and brittle —increasing risk for fracture, usually in the hip, wrist or spine. Bone is living tissue under a constant state of turnover, old bone being broken down and replaced by new bone. Osteoporosis occurs when the creation of new bone doesn't keep up with the removal of old bone.

The term osteopenia indicates the bones are weaker but not yet at a level of osteoporosis. There are many contributing factors including a diet deficient in nutrients required for new bone to be created, chronic stress, inadequate sleep, sedentary lifestyle, medications such as steroids and acid-blockers, and hormone deficiencies.

Patients often come to my practice for natural treatment of osteoporosis and osteopenia, usually after their physician has recommended bisphosphonate medications, such as Fosamax, Actonel, Boniva or Reclast. These medications block your body's breakdown of bone. The problem with this approach is that in order for bones to be healthy and strong, old bone needs to be removed.

Medications that block bone breakdown increase the density of bone on x-ray, but do not build healthy bone. Instead these medications create unhealthy bone that over time becomes more prone to fracture. In addition, these drugs can lead to an abnormal bone condition in the jaw called osteonecrosis. Many patients don't tolerate these medications due to irritation of the esophagus, causing heartburn and sometimes leading to ulcers of the esophagus.



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The most effective way to reverse bone loss is to correct the underlying causes. Most importantly, you need to provide your body with adequate building blocks to create new bone. Although the primary element of the bones is calcium, it is NOT all about getting more calcium. There are at least 20 key nutrients that your bones need to stay healthy. Eating foods rich in these nutrients is the most important component of preventing bone loss. Vitamin D is essential to bone health. We get Vitamin D primarily from sunshine, not food. We also need movement to stimulate the bone building process, both weight-bearing such as walking and resistance training. Stress and lack of sleep also disrupt the bone building process because the stress hormone cortisol pushes the balance towards bone loss. Therefore, relaxing activities and adequate sleep are also essential to keeping our bones strong.

Below is my approach to treatment of osteopenia and osteoporosis:

- Get baseline laboratory testing to include vitamin D, nutritional and hormone levels and a baseline bone density test. In addition, a special test that measures bone loss, called urine NTX, is extremely helpful because it allows you to monitor for improvement with nutritional supplements and lifestyle changes.
- Take enough Vitamin D to get your blood levels of 25-OH Vitamin D between 50 and 70.
- Get your calcium mostly from plants (not dairy), which are rich in all the other bone building nutrients including B-vitamins, vitamins A, C and K, magnesium and many other minerals. These should include lots of leafy greens, broccoli, spinach, citrus, berries, figs, whole grains, nuts, seeds and non-dairy milk or yogurt. Half of your plate at each meal should be from plant foods.
- Exercise at least 20 minutes daily to include walking and resistance training which stimulates your bones to stay strong.
- Get at least 7 hours of sleep and engage in relaxing activity at least 30 minutes per day.
- Monitor blood and urine tests every 3 months until optimal and check bone density every 2 years.
- Consider bioidentical hormones if indicated, which can help prevent further bone loss.

Stacey Robinson, MD is a physician board certified in Family Medicine and Integrative Medicine and author of the book *Road Map to Health: 7 Steps to Alter Your Destination*. For more information about her practice, go to RobinsonMed.com or call (727) 329-8859 to schedule a consultation.

