

Generations

Active Lifestyles for the 50+ Generation

You Can Prevent Broken Bones



by Kimberly
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Did you know that bone fractures are often caused by osteoporosis especially in women over the age of 50? Did you know that most of these fractures are completely preventable?

Osteoporosis is a disease that develops when bone mass and bone tissue are lost. This loss of bone is normal after age 35, but accelerates for women in postmenopausal years – i.e. after age 50. More than 10 million people have already been diagnosed with osteoporosis and more than 18 million others are at risk for developing osteoporosis. One in two women suffer an osteoporotic fracture after age 50 and one in eight men will suffer an osteoporotic fracture after age 70.

According to the World Health Organization, post-menopausal Caucasian women are at the highest risk with Asian women being the next highest ethnic group affected by osteoporosis. Other risk factors include slender build, immobility, smoking, thyroid disease, family history of osteoporosis, and long-term use of steroids or Depo-Provera contraceptives.

Osteoporosis is a somewhat preventable disease. Nutrition plays an important role in achieving and maintaining bone health. Both adults and children should pay special attention to calcium and vitamin D intake

as well as exercise to help maintain healthy bones. Loss of estrogen in menopausal women increases bone turnover, making women over 50 especially susceptible to bone thinning and loss.

Pay attention to the foods you eat. Calcium is found naturally in many healthy foods such as milk, cheese, broccoli, figs, and almonds, as well as certain “fortified” foods like orange juice, cereals and breads.

All postmenopausal women should consume or supplement their calcium and vitamin D intake such that calcium should be equal to 1500 mg/day and vitamin D should be 800 International Units/day. Talk with your practitioner or a nutrition expert to find out how much to supplement through diet versus how much to take with vitamin supplements. Vitamin D naturally comes through sun exposure, so taking a 30 minute walk/day is healthy not only because of its weight-bearing exercise, but on a sunny day can help to increase your body’s vitamin D stores.

If you are a woman over the age of 50 or have other risk factors for developing osteoporosis, talk with your health care provider about having a DEXA scan. A DEXA scan is a painless X-ray that can diagnose early bone thinning or osteopenia. Osteopenia can be treated by supplementing calcium, vitamin D, exercise or medications such as Actonel, Fosamax or Boniva. Hormone replacement is also a good way to prevent bone loss in meno-

pausal women; however, be sure that if you choose hormone replacement you use the minimal doses and are closely monitored due to hormone replacement’s potentially dangerous side-effects.

For those men and women who have been diagnosed with bone thinning – osteopenia or bone loss – osteoporosis there is still hope that you can avoid the pain of an osteoporosis-related fracture. Change your diet, quit smoking, supplement calcium and vitamin D, if necessary, start an exercise program that includes weight bearing such as stationary biking, walking and weight lifting. (Always check with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.)

Finally, men and women over 50 should have their height measured each year during their annual physical as loss of height may sometimes be the first sign of bone loss. Keep in mind that Americans are living longer than ever. If you are fortunate enough to live until the age of 80 or 90, bone loss and fractures can lead to significant pain, immobility and complications from bone fractures often lead to death in the elderly.

Take control of your bone health! Talk to your health care provider about ways to prevent bone loss and ultimately reduce the risk of painful bone-fractures over your lifetime.

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