



Bone Health

Bone Health is not a topic in which many people take much interest. In fact, women usually take for granted how important it is to care for their bones. But the truth is, once a woman is 30, she no longer has young bones! It's true, that most bone mass has been built in your body by age 18... and once the skeleton is 30 years old, it will NEVER be any stronger unless a medicine is used to make it stronger.

How the body uses calcium

Calcium is needed for the muscles and nerves to function properly. Calcium is also needed to help build strong bones. The bones actually serve as “storage bins” of calcium. If the nerves and muscles can't get the calcium that they need on a daily basis from foods or vitamins that you eat, the nerves and muscles will borrow calcium from the bones. Prior to age 30, if you borrowed calcium from your bones, your own body would “pay the bones back” and put more calcium into the bones when you ate more calcium. However, after age 30, your body does not pay back the bones the calcium that it borrowed, and therefore, the bones get weaker and weaker. We don't fully understand why this happens – but what we do know... is that our bones get weaker and weaker after age 30. That's a fact.

How taking calcium can help the body

If you take a calcium pill, or eat foods rich in calcium, every time your muscles and nerves need calcium, they will not have to “borrow” calcium from the bones. Therefore, taking calcium prevents bone loss. If you are less than 30 years old, calcium can be used to build up calcium storage in your bones. You will need this storage system once you are 30 and can no longer store calcium.

Does taking calcium build bones that have already been weakened?

NO; not if you are over 30! You probably did not know this!!! The only purpose calcium plays if you are over 30, is preventing further bone loss. This means you DO need to keep taking calcium, it just isn't building your bones back up... it's

being used for your muscles and nerves, and protecting the bone you have from being used up instead.

Things you can do to Prevent further Bone Loss:

- Exercise, especially weight bearing exercise, helps prevent bone loss.
- Not drinking caffeine (coffee, tea and sodas) can help your bones stay strong.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, be sure to get enough calcium and vitamin D.
- Getting 10 minutes of sunshine per day is also a good way to help you use the calcium that you take.

What can I do to build up weakened bones if calcium doesn't do this?

The only way to rebuild bones after the age of 30 is to take medicines that will help the body do this. Fortunately, most women can prevent the need to use these medicines by taking care of their bones early in life and throughout life.

There are some things in particular that weaken bones.

There are some medicines that weaken bones. DEPO PROVERA (the birth control shot) weakens bones a LOT. You should not use this medicine greater than 18 months total in your entire life. That equals 6 shots total. If you are on the "Depo" shot and have gotten a shot more than 6 times, you need to change your method of birth control.

What foods are best for supplying calcium?

** Dairy can be high in saturated fat. Look for low fat versions of milks, cheeses, and ice cream.

1. Cheese
2. Yogurt, Ice Cream, and Milk **
3. Green leafy vegetables: Kale, Collards, Spinach, Broccoli
4. Iron fortified cereals, breads, grains (look for the words that say "iron fortified")
5. Beans, sesame seeds, and almonds
6. Tofu
7. Salmon and sardines with bones

The Goal is to get about 1200-1500 milligrams of calcium per day.

You may see that you aren't getting enough calcium in your diet. You may easily take a calcium supplement. Take 500 mg at a time, 3 times daily, in order to fully benefit from the supplement (***)you won't be able to absorb more than 500 at a time so taking more than 500 at a time is really wasting it!).

What are some of the short and long term complications of weak bones?

Weak bones can cause many problems for the body. The most obvious, is higher risk of fracture. But long before a fracture occurs, the bones weaken and change their structure. Often, this causes pain and disfigurement as the muscles surrounding the bones pull the bones out of alignment. This is generally not reversible, and instead, the woman must endure long-term pain and suffering. Pain often leads to decreased movement (protective behaviors) and eventually a bedridden woman. This can lead to depression and dependent behaviors.

One of the worst perils of weakened bones is the occurrence of hip or spine fracture.

Large numbers of women slip and fall in their own homes, which results in a devastating hip fracture. Did you know that 80% of women who fracture their hip die within one year of the fracture? It is true! Hip fracture carries with it a lot of complications and many women die from those complications within 12 months of the fracture. Fortunately, hip fracture can be prevented. Prevention starts with protecting the bones with calcium before the age of 30. But if you already have weak bones, preventive measures must be taken at home to prevent a slip and fall.

Trip hazards include: area rugs, small underfoot pets and children, poor lighting, electric cords, inaccessibility to bathrooms, furniture barriers (table legs, ottomans, stools), etc. Take the following measures to decrease your own trip hazards:

1. Remove any rugs that may peel up and trip you.
2. Keep pets and children out from under your feet. Gate them up while you cook, sleep, etc.
3. Install nightlights near beds, hallways, and bathrooms.
4. Remove cords from walking areas.
5. Keep furniture out of your way. Clear up your walking areas!
6. Install nonslip adhesives to the bathtub and bathroom areas. Use a bath seat in the shower.

How to know if your bones are weak:

If you have been through menopause, or if you no longer have your ovaries due to surgical removal, have a DEXA scan to test the strength of your bones. This test will be prescribed for you in your annual well woman exam. If you would like to have this test before menopause, ask the provider to schedule a test for you.

If you have osteoporosis:

The provider will develop a plan of care aimed at strengthening your bones.

Follow this plan of care and take appropriate measures to strengthen your bones.
Take care of your bones! They take care of you!