Can I prevent osteoporosis?

Broken bones are not an inevitable part of getting older and osteoporosis can now be largely prevented and treated. There is much you can do to try to build and maintain strong, healthy bones that will help prevent osteoporosis.

Your genes determine the potential height and strength of your skeleton but lifestyle factors can influence the amount of bone you lay down in the bone ‘bank’ in youth and how much you save in later life.

Did you know?

- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 12 men over the age of 50 have osteoporosis.
- Treating broken bones from osteoporosis costs the NHS and government around £5 million a day.
- You have the same number of bones in your neck as a giraffe.
- Over half the body’s 206 bones are found in the hands and feet.

Eat a balanced, calcium-rich diet

Children and teenagers especially need plenty of calcium in their diets as this is the period when bones grow and strengthen rapidly.

Most popular snack foods such as crisps, biscuits, sweets and fizzy drinks are high in fats or have insufficient vitamins and minerals essential for bone health.
Why do we need healthy bones?

Your bones are alive and constantly changing as old worn out bone is replaced by new bone. This means that you need to look after your skeleton throughout life.

In childhood, the cells that form new bone work faster, enabling your skeleton to increase in density and strength. During this period of rapid growth it takes the skeleton just two years to renew itself completely; in adults this takes about 7 to 10 years. After bones have stopped growing in length, at the age of 16-18, they still increase in density into one’s early 20’s.

What is osteoporosis?

The basic structure of bone does not change with age. But from the mid-thirties bone density and strength is reduced. This is part of the natural ageing process, but in some men and many women far too much bone is lost. The skeleton becomes so fragile that the simplest knock or fall can break a bone, particularly in the wrist, spine and hip. This condition is known as osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis literally means porous bones. The bones in our skeleton are made of a thick outer shell and a strong inner mesh, which forms a honeycomb structure. Osteoporosis occurs when this structure thins, making bones fragile and easy to break.
Prevention is...

During childhood and adolescence, boys need 1,000mg of calcium a day and girls need 800mg. The very best sources of calcium are dairy products including milk, cheese and yogurt.

**Did you know?**
- Our bodies contain over 1kg of calcium. 99% of which is found in the bones.
- Low-fat varieties of dairy products contain just as much calcium as their full-fat counterparts.

**Take regular, weight-bearing exercise**

Like muscles and other parts of the body, bones suffer if they are not used. They need regular weight-bearing exercise that exerts a loading impact and stretches and contracts the muscles, stimulating bone to strengthen.

Weight-bearing exercises, which help build better bones, include:
- skipping
- jumping
- aerobics
- netball
- tennis
- running
- dancing
- brisk walking

Try to exercise at least three times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes but, most importantly, choose exercise that you enjoy.

**Did you know?**
- Tennis players have 30% more bone density in their serving arm than in their non-serving arm.
- Astronauts whose skeletons are exposed to long periods of weightlessness lose bone density.
Choose a wide variety of foods from the different food groups: milk and dairy products; bread and cereals; fruit and vegetables; meat, fish and poultry, to form a well balanced, calcium-rich diet.
Can you find the following words:

Healthy bones / Osteoporosis / Skeleton / Calcium
Milk / Cheese / Yogurt / Exercise / Walking / Jumping
Skipping / Aerobics

The National Osteoporosis Society (NOS) is the only national charity dedicated to improving the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of this fragile bone disease. The NOS offers support to people with osteoporosis, their families and carers, through a range of detailed information booklets, a national telephone helpline and a network of regional support groups. Increasing numbers of people are developing osteoporosis and more people need our help every year.

For further information about bone health please contact the NOS on 01761 471771 or visit the website www.nos.org.uk

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