This leaflet is endorsed by the National Osteoporosis Society. This leaflet was printed with a donation from GlaxoSmithKline. Help the Aged is grateful for their support.

If you would like this leaflet in another format, such as large print or audio tape, please contact the Information Resources Team on 020 7278 1114.
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Why do healthy bones matter?

It is very important to keep our bones healthy throughout our lives. The skeleton isn’t a dead coathanger - it’s living tissue which needs to be nourished and exercised to keep it strong. Like other parts of the body it has to be protected from disease. This leaflet provides advice on how to keep bones strong and healthy as we get older.

Bone health

Bones are alive and constantly changing, with new bone being made and old bone lost throughout our lives. In adults, the entire skeleton is completely replaced every seven to ten years. Bones continue to grow in strength until the age of about 35 when old bone starts to be lost at a faster rate than new bone can be formed to replace it. In some men and women this bone loss is so severe that their bones become weak, fragile and liable to break very easily. This condition is known as osteoporosis. Fortunately, we can take measures to reduce the risk of developing this disease, enabling us to maintain strong bones through to old age.
Avoiding broken bones

One in three women and one in 12 men over 50 will suffer a broken bone as a result of osteoporosis. The most common bones to break are bones in the hip, spine or wrist. Women are particularly at risk because during and after the menopause they experience rapid bone loss when the ovaries stop producing the female hormone oestrogen.

As well as being very painful, coping with a broken bone can make independent living difficult and may cause long-term problems with mobility. With approximately three million sufferers in the UK alone, osteoporosis is now a serious health problem.

But whatever your age, there are some simple measures you can take to prevent yourself from suffering broken bones.

- Avoid falls.
- Eat a well balanced diet with enough calcium and vitamin D.
- Take regular weight-bearing exercise, such as brisk walking, keep-fit, skipping and dancing.
- Seek advice from your family doctor.
- Make sure you get enough vitamin D from the sun by taking short breaks outside during the spring and summer months.
Avoiding falls

As you get older, you are more likely to have a fall, so it is important to take a look at your home to make it as safe as possible. Some simple, practical steps you could take include:

- Look out for anything that might make you trip or slip. Make sure that carpets and rugs are fixed down well and there are no trailing electrical wires. Avoid leaving slippery objects like magazines on the floor.

- Be particularly careful when grandchildren are visiting. They may leave toys where you don’t expect them, which could easily trip you up.

- Keep pet food dishes in a corner, where they can’t be tripped over.

- Try to store objects you use every day at a reasonable height to avoid reaching or bending. You could also try using ‘reaching aids’, such as handle extensions and a pick-up tool. The ‘Disabled Living Foundation’ (address on page 10) can give advice on gadgets which make everyday activities easier.

- Make sure that stairways are well lit and think about installing a hand rail for extra safety. Regular sight tests will reassure you that your sight is as good as it can be.

- A rubber mat in the bath and a ‘grab rail’ make it much easier to get out of the bath without slipping.

- You may need to take extra care outside in winter when slippery and uneven pavements and kerb stones may cause you to trip and fall.
Wear well fitting shoes with a strap or laces. Try to avoid shoes with heels or mules.

Our advice leaflet, 'Safety in Your Home' makes more suggestions on avoiding accidents in the home.

**Enjoy a well balanced diet**

A healthy, balanced diet is needed to supply the body with energy, essential nutrients and fibre. An adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D is important to maintain bone health, particularly as you grow older. Try to include the following foods in your daily diet:

Foods containing calcium
- Milk, cheese, yoghurt and other dairy products
- Tinned sardines and pilchards - including the soft bones!
- Beans such as baked beans, kidney beans and lentils
- Okra, spinach, kale and broccoli
- Nuts and tahini
- Tofu
- Dried fruit such as figs, prunes, raisins and dates

Foods containing vitamin D
- Margarine
- Breakfast cereals
- Oily fish (such as tuna)
- Egg yolks
- Liver