Healthy Bones

Caring for your bones

Advice for older people

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National Osteoporosis Society
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- Fire
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- Keep Out the Cold
- Your Safety
- Your Security

Leaflets are free of charge and available from the Information Resources Team at the address on the back page, email adviceleaflets@helptheaged.org.uk or fax 0870 770 3282.

This leaflet is endorsed by the National Osteoporosis Society.

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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It is very important to keep our bones healthy throughout our lives. The skeleton isn't a dead coat hanger – it's a 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 two women and one in five men over 50 will suffer a broken bone, mainly 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.

Coping with a broken bone is not only very painful but also makes independent living difficult and may cause long-term problems with mobility. With approximately 3 million people living with osteoporosis in the UK alone, it 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, aerobics, skipping and dancing.
- Avoid smoking or excessive alcohol intake.
- 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, but there are things you can do to prevent falling. 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 the following:

- Keep an eye out for anything that could cause you to trip or slip. Remember to keep the floor clear of trailing flexes and rucked-up or fraying carpets that you might trip over or slip on. Make sure your stairs and floors are free of clutter.

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

- If you have a pet, be careful they don’t get under your feet. Keep pet food dishes in a corner, where you can’t trip over them.

- 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 eye tests will reassure you that your sight is as good as it can be. See our free advice leaflet Better Sight for more information.

- 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 high heels, or mules.

Our free advice leaflet Your Safety makes more suggestions on preventing accidents in the home. For more information on improving strength and balance, and reducing the risk of falling, see our free advice leaflet Staying Steady.

**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**

- oily fish such as mackerel, herring or salmon
- margarine
- breakfast cereals
- egg yolks