

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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WOMEN CAN REDUCE CHANCES OF OSTEOPOROSIS BY FOLLOWING SIMPLE EXERCISE AND NUTRITION TIPS

DALLAS – May 17, 2001 – Osteoporosis-related bone fractures occur in one of every two women over the age of 50, but the opportunity to take preventive measures and fight this disease begins much earlier in a woman's life. Researchers at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas say there are simple steps to reduce the chances of being affected by this debilitating disease.

WHAT IS OSTEOPOROSIS?

Osteoporosis is a disease characterized by the loss of bone mass and poor bone quality. This disease causes bones to become fragile and susceptible to fractures, especially in the hip, spine and wrist.

Each year, osteoporosis is responsible for 1.5 million fractures. Yet most people are unaware fractures are related to osteoporosis. More than 70 percent of women with osteoporosis are not diagnosed, leaving them at increased risk for fractures.

EXERCISE BUILDS BONES

By the age of 35, most women have reached their maximum bone density. However, through routine exercise, women have the opportunity to maintain and possibly re-build their bones.

"Weight-bearing exercise can maintain bone density," said Dr. Howard Heller, assistant professor of internal medicine at UT Southwestern.

"The bone is believed to have mechanical sensors that are used to adapt the strength of the bone. So, for example, tennis players have a much higher bone density in their dominant arm."

Low bone density increases the risk of osteoporosis-related fracture.

Weight-bearing exercises like aerobics, weight training, and walking are effective at maintaining bone density. Balance-building exercises like tai-chi help decrease the risk of falling, and, in turn, fracture. By exercising regularly and eating a well-balanced diet, women of all ages have a much better chance of maintaining and/or building their bone strength.

PROPER DIET CAN OFFSET BONE LOSS

Some risk factors are controllable. Smoking, alcohol and physical inactivity increase the risk of osteoporosis, while proper nutrition – especially getting enough calcium – decreases that risk.

Diets high in salt or protein can be detrimental to bones. High salt content causes the loss of calcium from the body, and excess protein accelerates bone loss, according to Dr. Khashayar Sakhaee, professor of internal medicine and chief of mineral metabolism at UT Southwestern.

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“We know that calcium intake has the greatest impact on the development of peak bone mass,” said Sakhaee. “And it is well recognized that calcium supplements can help prevent bone loss in elderly patients.”

How much calcium do you need?

- Adolescents 1,200 milligrams of calcium daily
- Women age 25-50 1,000 mg
- Men age 25-65 1,000 mg
- Women 50+ 1,500 mg
- Men 65+ 1,500 mg

One glass of milk has 300 mg of calcium and one cup of yogurt averages 250 mg.

VITAMIN D IS ESSENTIAL FOR STRONG BONES

Many older women attempt to prevent osteoporosis by taking calcium supplements. They may be forgetting an important ingredient – vitamin D, which is necessary for the efficient absorption of calcium from the diet. Without it, bone mass diminishes and the risk of bone fracture increases.

“Vitamin D is present only in a few foods, such as fatty fish, cod liver oil and vitamin D-fortified milk. It also may be formed in the skin with adequate ultraviolet light exposure, but many older people avoid excess sun exposure,” Heller said. “In addition, as people age their production of vitamin D may decrease.”

Heller recommends that adults get 600 to 800 international units (IU) of vitamin D daily. Most multiple vitamins contain about half the needed amount of vitamin D, and calcium tablets contain about a fourth your daily need. Check with your physician if you think you are not getting enough vitamin D through your diet.

MAKE SURE A TRIP TO YOUR HOME DOESN'T TRIP UP OLDER VISITORS

Throw rugs on polished floors, worn spots on carpet and dark hallways may appear innocuous but can provide the perfect setting for an accident. Preventing falls is extremely important for osteoporosis sufferers.

“Falls are the most common cause of injury among people over 65, accounting for 87 percent of all fractures,” said Dr. Susan Murphy, clinical assistant professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at UT Southwestern. “Older adults may experience more falls because of poor vision and coordination and muscle weakness.”

She recommends a pre-visit inspection to prevent accidents. “Make sure rugs are secured around the edges, attach electrical cords to walls or moldings, minimize clutter in rooms and have appropriate lighting in stairs and doorway entrances.”

In the event of a fall – even if you don't suspect serious injury – Murphy suggests contacting your doctor. To decrease pain and swelling, apply an ice pack.

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