Sutter Health

5 Ways to Protect Your Bone Health

You might think of your bones as solid inside. But they're actually filled with lots of little holes like a honeycomb. Osteoporosis occurs when the holes grow in size, causing you to lose bone density. As a result, bones become weak and break easily.

Your risk of getting osteoporosis increases with age. The condition is particularly common in older women. Long-term use of certain medicines, such as corticosteroids and some anti-seizure drugs, also raises your risk. So does being sedentary for long periods of time or not getting enough physical activity.

Taking good care of your bones can help them stay stronger. Here's what to do:

1 **Get a bone density test.** This test is painless, similar to having an X-ray. All women older than age 65 should have their bone density checked, and some men may get the test, as well. Ask your healthcare provider how often you should repeat this test based on your risk factors.

2 **Consume calcium and vitamin D.** Good sources of calcium include low-fat milk and dairy products, dark green leafy vegetables, tofu, and calcium-fortified juices and cereals. Vitamin D is found in fortified milk, fish (salmon, tuna and trout) and eggs.

3 **Engage in weight-bearing exercise.** Examples include walking, gardening, climbing stairs, dancing, playing tennis and weight training.

4 **Avoid smoking and limit alcohol.** Long-term heavy drinking may cause bone loss. Smoking raises the risk of breaking a bone.

5 **Discuss medicine with your provider.** Several medicines are available to help prevent or treat osteoporosis. Ask your provider what's right for you.

If you've broken a bone recently, it's especially important to talk with your provider. Ask whether you should get a bone density test or start taking osteoporosis medicine. Remember, it's never too early to bone up on your bone health.

Sources include the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Developed by Krames, a WebMD Ignite solution 10024A–923SE4