

Discussion Guide

If you've been diagnosed with osteoporosis or bone loss, then you might be wondering, *am I doing everything I can to keep my bones healthy and strong?*

It's important that you focus on ways to improve your bone health. With proper diet and the right kind *and* the right amount of exercise, you may improve your bone health. And talk to your doctor about prescription medicine to help slow or stop the progression of bone loss and see what's right for you. This guide is designed to help you and your doctor do just that ... have a discussion about osteoporosis and bone loss. It provides important information you should know and key questions you should ask your doctor at your next visit.

Is osteoporosis serious?

Osteoporosis is a disease that should be taken very seriously. Osteoporosis, or loss of bone mass, means your bones become thinner or weaker, and it can lead to an increased risk of fracture. One in two women over age 50 will suffer an osteoporosis-related fracture in her remaining lifetime, which can result in significant pain and loss of height. Fractures may also interfere with a woman's ability to do everyday activities such as stand-up or even walk.

What can I do to improve my bone health or reduce my risk for bone loss?

The best way to reduce your risk is to talk with your doctor to develop a personalized prevention or treatment plan based on your needs. This may include prescription medication. Beyond this, there are steps all women can take to do the right things for their bones like eating a proper diet that includes the right vitamins and nutrients such as calcium and vitamin D, and exercising regularly.

What should I be eating to help improve my bone health?

It is essential for your bone health to eat a well-balanced diet containing a variety of foods, including fruits, vegetables, low-fat or fat-free dairy foods, whole grains, fish, poultry, and nuts.

The key is getting an adequate amount of vitamins from a diet rich in calcium, vitamin D, magnesium, protein, and potassium, but low in fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Most calcium intake is from dairy products. An easy way to meet the recommended daily requirement of calcium is by drinking three 8-ounce glasses of milk each day, in addition to the calcium contained in a healthy, normal diet.

What about vitamins to help improve my bone health?

Vitamin D is an especially important nutrient for bone health. It is made in the skin when you are exposed to sunlight. So whether you're out walking or working in your garden, spending time outdoors in the warm sun can benefit your bone health. Before applying sunscreen, get 10-15 minutes of direct sunshine three times a week.

Vitamin D also comes from foods like fortified milks and breads. People with osteoporosis may be asked to take vitamin D supplements by their physicians.

What types of exercises should I do and how often to maintain my bone health?

Weight-bearing exercises, such as walking, lifting weights, and gardening, are important for any osteoporosis prevention and treatment program, regardless of your age. These exercises can increase and protect your bone mass. Consider starting with at least 30 minutes of moderate activity, such as walking, every day, and some weight-bearing, strength-building, and balance-enhancing activities two or more times each week. Keep in mind your previous level of activity. If you've been inactive, then start with shorter times and easier activities such as walking. Then over time, gradually increase the amount of time or the intensity of your exercises. This will help you avoid injury. You should always remember to talk to your doctor before beginning any new physical activities or health programs.

I have bone loss, osteoporosis. Is there anything I can do to stop or reverse bone loss?

Although calcium, vitamin D and exercise are helpful and part of a complete osteoporosis management plan, they may not be enough to protect your bones. For women with osteoporosis or low bone mass, medication, including prescription medicines, can be a key factor in keeping bones strong and lowering the risk of fractures. If you have been diagnosed with osteoporosis, then it is important to receive treatment that can help slow or stop the progression of bone loss.

But it's important to remember that no medication can work if you don't take it. Several studies show that taking your osteoporosis medication as prescribed by your doctor results in fewer broken bones. So if your doctor prescribes a medication, be sure to get it filled, and continue to take it as directed.

Talk to your doctor about how to manage your bone health, including diet, exercise, and treatment options.