

HOW FIRM IS YOUR FOUNDATION?

May was National Bone Health Month so I think a few words on the subject is appropriate. Osteoporosis is a disease that affects 10 million Americans, most of whom are women. An additional 18 million Americans already have low bone mass, osteopenia, that places them at increased risk. Osteoporosis can cause crippling fractures and a resultant loss of independence.

Early intervention is vital because adolescence is a critical period for bone growth. By age 20, the average woman has attained most of her skeletal mass. Hopefully girls 9 - 12 years old, will be encouraged by those who influence them, including parents, teachers, coaches, church youth group leaders as well as health care professionals, to establish lifelong healthy habits, especially increased calcium consumption and physical activity to build and maintain stronger, denser bones.

Osteoporosis is a disease in which bones become fragile and more likely to break. If not prevented or if left untreated, osteoporosis can progress painlessly until a bone breaks. Often those who fall and have fractured a hip have actually fractured the hip and then they have fallen. Broken bones occur typically in the hip, spine, and wrist.

Any bone can be affected, but of special concern are fractures of the hip and spine. A hip fracture almost always requires hospitalization and major surgery. It can impair a person's ability to walk unassisted and may cause prolonged or permanent disability or even death. Spinal or vertebral fractures also have serious consequences, including loss of height, severe back pain, and deformity.

Millions of Americans are at risk. While women are four times more likely than men to develop the disease, men also suffer from osteoporosis. Building strong bones, especially before the age of 30, can be the best defense against developing osteoporosis, and a healthy lifestyle can be critically important for keeping bones strong.

Osteoporosis is largely preventable for most people. Prevention of this disease is very important because, while there are treatments for osteoporosis, there is currently no cure. There are four steps to prevent osteoporosis. No one step alone is enough to prevent osteoporosis but all four may. They are:

- * A balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D
- * Weight-bearing exercise
- * A healthy lifestyle with no smoking or excessive alcohol use
- * And bone density testing and medications when appropriate

:CALCIUM

Calcium is needed for the heart, muscles and nerves to function properly and for blood to clot. Inadequate calcium is thought to contribute to the development of osteoporosis. National nutrition surveys have shown that many women and young girls consume less than half the amount of calcium recommended to grow and maintain healthy bones. Depending on your age, an appropriate calcium intake falls between 1000 and 1300 mg a day. If you have difficulty getting enough calcium from the foods you eat, you may take a calcium supplement to make up the difference.

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is needed for the body to absorb calcium. Without enough vitamin D, you will be unable to absorb calcium from the foods you eat, and your body will have to take calcium **from your bones**. Vitamin D comes from two sources: through the skin following direct exposure to sunlight and from the diet. Experts recommend a daily intake between 400 and 800 IU per day, which can be obtained from fortified dairy products, egg yolks, saltwater fish and liver.

EXERCISE

Exercise is also important to good bone health. If you exercise regularly in childhood and adolescence, you are more likely to reach your peak bone density than those who are inactive. The best exercise for your bones is weight-bearing exercise such as walking, dancing, jogging, stair-climbing, racquet sports and hiking. If you have been sedentary most of your adult life, be sure to check with your healthcare provider before beginning any exercise program.

BONE MINERAL DENSITY TESTS

A Bone Mineral Density test (BMD) is the only way to diagnose osteoporosis and determine your risk for future fracture. Since osteoporosis can develop undetected for decades until a fracture occurs, early diagnosis is important. A BMD measures the density of your bones (bone mass) and is necessary to determine whether you need medication to help maintain your bone mass, prevent further bone loss and reduce fracture risk. A bone mineral density (BMD) test is a special type of test that is accurate, painless and noninvasive.

MEDICATIONS FOR PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Although there is no cure for osteoporosis, There are medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for prevention and/or treatment of osteoporosis. Each of these medications slows or stops bone loss, increases bone density and reduces fracture risk. Based on the results of your BMD your health care provider will discuss this possibility with you.

Although there is no cure for osteoporosis, there are steps you can take to prevent it or to slow or stop its progress. It is never too early or too late to start your prevention program. Look on the bulletin board outside Shirley's office for a list of Calcium requirements according to age as well as a list of foods and how much Calcium you can get from just eating healthfully. Then take the simple test to see if you are getting enough.

Here's to a FIRM FOUNDATION !

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