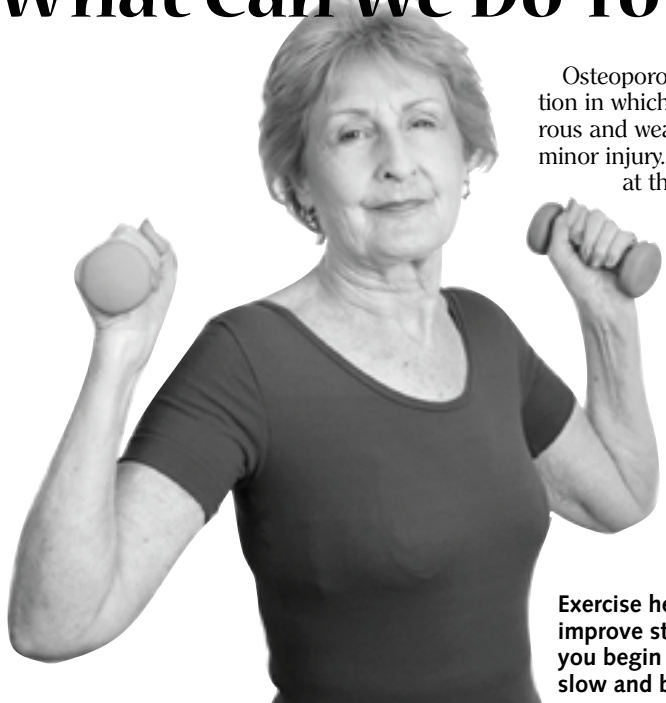


What Can We Do To Prevent Osteoporosis?



Osteoporosis is an age-related condition in which the bones become so porous and weak that they can break from a minor injury. Fractures most often occur at the spine, hip and wrist. The prevalence of osteoporosis is approximately 10 million people in the United States with 34 million people being at risk. Osteoporosis affects women more than men, however 30% of all hip fractures occur in men. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, a woman's risk of hip fracture is equal to her combined risk of breast, uterine and ovarian cancer.

Exercise helps to retain bone mass, improve strength and balance. When you begin an exercise program, start slow and build up.

crease animal protein because meat causes an increase in the excretion of calcium. A vegetarian diet with fish seems to be most effective.

Some vegetarian sources of protein include tofu, tempeh, amaranth, barley, quinoa, lentils, whole beans, cottage cheese, nuts, seeds and protein powder to name a few. I would recommend reducing coffee intake to two cups per day as some studies suggest coffee accelerates bone

loss. Tea even with caffeine appears to be safe. Foods which have high calcium content such as dark leafy greens need to be included in your diet. Fish and essential fatty acids improve the strength of bone and increase calcium absorption.

How much calcium should I take? What about Vitamin D? Calcium helps to maintain bone mass and reduce the risk of fractures. It is also important in muscle contraction, release of neurotransmitters and the

Continued on Page 11



All's Well
Health for Body, Mind, Spirit

by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND

Who is at risk for osteoporosis? Older women with a family history of osteoporosis, who have fractures after age 50, are at the highest risk. Certain chronic conditions that increase the risk of osteoporosis include anorexia nervosa, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes and gastrointestinal diseases. Women who go through early menopause, i.e. less than 45, or who have low sex hormones place a woman at risk. Men who have low levels of testosterone are also at risk. Risk factors that can be changed include smoking, alcohol intake greater than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men, excessive intake of coffee, animal protein, low calcium intake, vitamin D deficiency, and inadequate exercise.

How is osteoporosis diagnosed? The DXA (dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry) has been used to diagnose osteoporosis. The diagnosis is based on T-Scores. A T score between -1 and -2.5 is considered osteopenia (bone mass or bone mineral density lower than normal). A T score of -2.5 or lower is considered osteoporosis. A score of -2.5 and a fragility fracture is considered severe osteoporosis. Fractures increase in the fourth decade of life and continue with age. Most recently, the FRAX is being used to predict the probability that an individual will experience a fracture in the four major areas (spine, forearm, hip, shoulder) over the next 10 years. This tool is available on line at the following address: www.shef.ac.uk/FRAX. Go ahead and check your risk. There is a place for your DXA score however you can still use the tool if you do not have that score.

What lifestyle factors can I implement to increase bone mass? Exercise helps to retain bone mass, improve strength and balance. When you begin an exercise program, start slow and build up. Weight bearing or strength exercise along with aerobic exercise appears to be most beneficial.

Food does affect our bones. It is essential that we eat protein and at the same time de-



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What Can We Do To Prevent Osteoporosis?

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regulation of heartbeat. Premenopausal women need 1000 mg of calcium, postmenopausal women not on hormone replacement need 1500mg and all women over 65 need 1500mg. Generally, we can get 500mg of calcium from food. Vitamin D is essential for both calcium and phosphorus absorption and it promotes bone mineralization. Research demonstrates that vitamin D prevents falls and decreases hip fractures. It is well known that here in the northwest, we are typically deficient in Vitamin D. I recommend that everyone get their vitamin D levels checked and supplement according to individual need. Other

vitamins and minerals that play an important role in bone health include magnesium, vitamin K, vitamin C, B vitamins, manganese, silicon, zinc and copper. Magnesium is essential for calcium metabolism. Food sources of magnesium include kelp, wheat bran, nuts, tofu and apricots. Vitamin K is required for osteocalcin, which is a protein matrix where mineralization occurs. There are a number of products available with a combination of vitamins and minerals necessary to maintain bone mineral density. There is some evidence that elderly patients low in DHEA showed an increase in bone mineral density with supplementation. I would suggest that you consult your health care practitioner

to determine which product best meets your needs. There has been some controversy as to whether vitamin A causes a decrease in bone mineral density. In light of the controversy, I would recommend that you choose a multiple vitamin with a low dose of vitamin A and supplement with Beta Carotene. There are times when an individual will need to treat osteoporosis with medications. Raloxifene is an estrogen agonist/antagonist and the other class of medications most often prescribed are the bisphosphonates, a common one is alendronate or Fosamax. When a woman has vasomotor symptoms and chooses hormone therapy,

estrogen will prevent bone loss. There is some data that show an association of hotflashes and night sweats with lower bone mineral density. It is in early menopause that we are most at risk for bone loss. There is some recent evidence that microdose transdermal estradiol is effective in preventing bone loss at the lumbar spine. There are new ideas and options on the horizon. Remember to think about your bone health, stay active and enjoy

being engaged in life. *Moirá Fitzpatrick is a licensed naturopathic physician who specializes in women's healthcare. She is also a clinical psychologist and integrates health and mental health. She practices in the Northgate area of Seattle and can be reached at (206) 525-5576, drfitznd@comcast.net or www.theemeraldcenter.com.*

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