

## Don't let osteoporosis get you all bent out of shape

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By Kathleen Hall

You've seen her: the older woman, stooped over with a cane or walker, a noticeable hump on her back protruding from under her clothes.

In 2002, approximately 30 million women aged 50 or older had or were at risk for osteoporosis, a debilitating and painful disease caused by low bone mass and structure. According the National Osteoporosis Foundation, this staggering number is expected to increase to 35 million over the next six years.

Many women in their 20s, 30s, or 40s think osteoporosis is an old person's ailment and assume it does not affect them. Unfortunately most Americans are not aware of the risks nor do they take steps to prevent it. Ed Stumpf, clinical exercise physiologist at CJW's Cardiac Rehab Center, said bone loss is not something that can be seen or touched, much like high blood pressure.

Osteoporosis typically progresses without notice until a bone breaks and by then, significant bone loss has occurred. But there's good news. The two most important things women can do to ward off osteoporosis are well within control: proper nutrition and physical activity.

According to the experts at CJW Medical Center, osteoporosis occurs when the rate of bone loss (a normal body function) exceeds the rate at which it is replaced with new bone. Until bone mass peaks at about age 30, new bone is added faster than old bone is removed.

Gender and age are primary risk factors. Because women have less bone mass, they are four times more likely to get osteoporosis than men, and this risk increases with age. Furthermore, after menopause, women produce less estrogen, which accelerates bone loss.

The steps to good bone health and preventing osteoporosis are straightforward:

**Exercise.** Regular weight bearing exercise - anything that causes the body to work against gravity - helps to build strong bones and muscles. Stumpf said it's important that women get out and get moving. Activities such as walking, jogging, calisthenics, and working with weights are good resistance exercises. Even daily chores such as cleaning house or gardening help women stay active.

**Don't Smoke.** Smoking correlates to lower estrogen and a decrease in the body's ability to absorb calcium. Not starting, or quitting, smoking is a healthy choice all the way around.

**Proper Nutrients.** Get the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of calcium and vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium. The Cornell Healthy Eating Program reports that 80% of Americans do not consume enough calcium daily. The RDA for calcium is 1000 mg/day for women under 50 and 1200 mg/day for women over 50. Vitamin D is absorbed through the skin from the sun and also comes from diet. The RDA for Vitamin D is 400-800 IU/day. Both nutrients are found in fortified dairy products, egg yolks, saltwater fish, liver, and when needed, supplements.

Many women don't get the proper nutrients they need, because they aggressively diet. "You are what you eat," said Stumpf. "Balanced diet and activity maintains weight and helps you reach your fitness

goals. When you diet, you can miss out on vitamins, minerals, and calcium, which accelerates bone loss.”

**Early Detection.** Diagnosing osteoporosis early is important. The sooner a woman identifies her risk, the sooner she can begin preventative measures and treatment. The National Osteoporosis Foundation reports that women do not perceive themselves to be at risk, even though one in two women over 50 will experience an osteoporosis-related fracture in their lifetime.

The most commonly used tool to diagnose osteoporosis is the bone mineral density test, which is an accurate, painless, and non-invasive method to measure the density of bones. Women who are post-menopausal or have any of the risk factors should talk to their physician about this test.

**Begin Early.** Bone health begins early in life. By age 18, skeletal growth is nearly complete. A healthy diet and active lifestyle when young is important to preventing osteoporosis later in life.

Young girls who diet regularly, have eating disorders, or do not have regular menstrual periods are putting themselves at risk for low bone density. Osteoporosis can, and does, strike young people.

According to the National Institutes on Health, “Building your child’s ‘bone bank’ account is a lot like saving for their education. The more they can put away when they’re young, the longer it lasts as they get older.”

For more information, visit the National Osteoporosis Foundation at [www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org) or the National Institutes for Health osteoporosis site at [www.osteoporosis.nih.gov](http://www.osteoporosis.nih.gov).