7 Nutrition Mistakes You're Making With Osteoporosis

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Osteoporosis Diet Mistakes to Avoid

Nutrition and bone health are closely linked. If you have osteoporosis and are not getting enough of the right nutrients in your diet, you put yourself at risk for further bone loss and a higher chance for bone breaks and fractures.

Here are seven osteoporosis diet mistakes you might be making that may worsen your condition.

You Are Not Getting Enough Calcium

Calcium is essential for healthy bones. Your body does not make calcium so you must get it from the foods you eat.

The amount of calcium needed on a daily basis is 1,000 milligrams for people age 50 and younger and 1,200 milligrams for people age 51 or older, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

Unfortunately, research shows most people are only getting half the amount of calcium suggested.

Dairy foods are the best sources of calcium, but some vegetables, especially the leafy green ones, contain up to 270 milligrams. Other foods containing calcium include oranges, almonds, sardines, tofu and calcium-fortified foods, such as cereal.

You Are Not Getting Enough Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important for the development of healthy bones. You need vitamin D to absorb the calcium from your diet.

Women who take vitamin D supplements experience less bone loss than women who do not, according to a study from the United Kingdom. The U.K. study looked at whether vitamin D supplements help make bones denser and stronger, and the women taking supplements had much denser bones at the end of the study than the women who did not. More dense bones means their bones are less vulnerable to fractures and breaks.

Once you have osteoporosis, vitamin D will not help build your bone density back up, but you still need vitamin D to help you absorb calcium.

Good sources of vitamin D are natural sunlight and fortified milk, egg yolks, some saltwater fish, liver and supplements.

Talk to your doctor about getting more vitamin D in your diet or about taking vitamin D supplements. You may also want your levels checked to confirm you are not vitamin D deficient.

You Eat a High-Protein Diet

For decades, meat was recommended for good bone health. But newer research suggests high-protein diets might actually promote bone mineral density loss, which leads to osteoporosis.

But there is little accurate evidence that protein may worsen osteoporosis and promote bone loss. It appears reasonable, however, to avoid a high protein diet, especially if you are not getting enough calcium from protein sources.

You should still eat protein — just in moderation. Good sources of protein are tuna, chicken, salmon, yogurt, milk and eggs.

You Are Not Taking Vitamins and Supplements

Getting at least the minimum recommended amount of nutrients is important in maintaining healthy bones and preventing bone loss from osteoporosis. You should try to get your nutrients from food sources.

But if you are not able to get enough vitamin D and calcium in your diet, consider taking vitamin D and calcium supplements. Take a separate supplement for calcium because calcium loses its effect when combined with other supplements.

You Are Not Getting Enough Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Fish oils positively impact bone support and fracture prevention, but researchers are not sure exactly how.

What researchers do know is omega-3 essential fatty acids defend our bones by lessening inflammation. Lowering inflammation is crucial because anything causing inflammation in the bones activates osteoclasts — the cells that absorb bone tissue to promote growth and healing.

Your osteoclasts remove damaged bone and they do it pretty quickly. Osteoblasts then start rebuilding new bone to replace old bone.

But when inflammation is chronic, your osteoclasts must work harder and too much activity results in bone thinning and ultimately, osteoporosis. By reducing inflammation, omega-3 fatty acids allow osteoblasts to lay down new bone.

You can get omega-3 fatty acids from the food you eat. Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids include flaxseed, eggs and seafood.

If you are not getting enough omega-3 fatty acids from your diet, the next best option is a fish oil supplement.

You Are Consuming Too Much Sodium

Eating foods high in sodium causes your body to lose calcium and furthers bone loss. You should try to limit the amount of processed, canned and salty foods from your diet.

To learn if a food is high in sodium, look at the nutrition labels. If there is 20% or more sodium for the daily value, it is too high in sodium. You only need about 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day.

You Consume Too Much Soda and Caffeine

Soft drinks lack calcium and contain phosphoric acid, which increases calcium excretion in your urine. The occasional soda is fine, but often people end up consuming more.

People who drink soda may also avoid drinks containing calcium. If that is the case for you, try drinking more yogurt smoothies, milk and orange juice instead.

Caffeine takes calcium from the bones, so it is a problem when you are already not getting enough calcium.

Coffee is a major caffeine source. Try decaffeinated hot and cold teas and coffee instead, and avoid caffeine-laden drinks, such as energy drinks.

Is There a Best Diet for Osteoporosis?

Because you cannot feel osteoporosis and there are no obvious symptoms, it is difficult to understand how what you are eating is affecting our bones. However, your diet either hurts or helps your bone health in the long run.

The best plan is to eat a diet low in sodium and rich in whole grains, fruits, veggies and low-fat protein options. Make sure you are getting enough calcium and vitamin D from your diet and taking supplements, if needed. Last, limit soft drinks and caffeine.