

Osteoporosis

By Dr. Wes Dawkins

When archeologists dig up ancient human skeletal remains one of the things they consistently discover is that our bone density is only a fraction of that of our ancestors. So what is so different between us and them that makes our bones weaker? Why is osteoporosis so common in our society?

Like most conditions, osteoporosis is caused by many factors, some of which are modifiable and some that are not. We can't do much about our genes, our age or our gender, but we can make choices that will decrease our chances of developing osteoporosis.

It wouldn't surprise most people to hear that an adequate daily intake of calcium and vitamin D are crucial to the health of our bones. Currently the recommended daily intake of calcium is between 1,000-1,500 mg and 200-600 IU for vitamin D. These levels can be reached through a well balance diet including dairy products and dark green veggies or through supplements if diet alone is insufficient.

Unfortunately calcium and vitamin D are not enough. We actually have to use our bones for them to stay strong or the old cliché "use it or lose it" becomes all too true. Our bones are alive and constantly remodeling. They react to the stress put on them by rebuilding themselves stronger, not unlike a bodybuilder lifting weights so his muscles grow back bigger and stronger. The best way to stress your bones is by participating in any number of activities that are considered weight bearing. These activities include walking, jogging, golf, tennis etc. The younger we are when we start these activities the better. We lose the ability to increase our bone density as we age, but we can minimize the rate at which we lose it by continuing to stay active. It's never too late to start.

There are also many other habits that can be modified to reduce our bone loss. Our body uses calcium to help neutralize some of the foods and beverages many of us enjoy. Caffeinated beverages, protein and alcohol are three major culprits. Limiting excessive intake of these means more of the calcium we eat will go to our bones helping to keep them strong. Smoking is another bone weakening habit. Smokers were found to have 5 to 8% less bone density than non-smokers. Quitting is one the healthiest decisions you can make.

Of course these are just a few tips to help keep your bones strong and healthy. Speak with a health professional if you'd like to learn more. Our bones may never be as strong as a caveman's but following some of the guidelines above will help get us a little closer.

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