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OSTEOPOROSIS AND BONE HEALTH

Osteoporosis is becoming a major health problem in the United States. The good news is that we are living to an older age. The bad news is that we tend to have weaker bones, with a tendency to fractures of the spine, hips, and other long bones. To a large extent, this is preventable, but you must take some action now.

A number of things can be done to manage and even prevent osteoporosis. A balanced diet with an adequate intake of calcium and Vitamin D is very important. Regular participation in weight bearing exercise, such as walking, cycling, and activities of that nature can help a considerable amount. Even walking in a swimming pool can help. Regular weight bearing exercise improves balance and muscle reaction time, helping to reduce the risk of falls. Decreasing your caffeine intake can help, because caffeine causes the kidneys to take calcium out of the bone and excrete it in the urine. Similarly, alcohol intake and smoking take calcium from the bones, leading to osteoporosis.

If one has osteoporosis already, it is very important for him or her to protect against falls. This can be done by making sure that the house has adequate lighting and that loose rugs and low tables with sharp corners are removed. Regular eye care is appropriate, as is proper foot wear. Slippers and “flip-flops” should be avoided. The name “flip-flop” pretty much tells it all.

We know that it is important for older girls and adult women to take in a sufficient amount of calcium each day. The amount of calcium that is actually used by the bones is called elemental, available, or free calcium. Supplements which contain calcium carbonate (such as Tums, Os-Cal, Caltrate, and Calci-Chew”) are very easily absorbed. Calcium phosphate and calcium citrate are also well absorbed. However, calcium lactate, calcium gluconate, and calcium gluconate are not as easily absorbed, and higher doses are necessary. Calcium tablets combined with Vitamin D are also available on the market.

Calcium is available in the diet in such foods as cheese, milk, sardines, and salmon. These also contain some Vitamin D. Check the labels. Exposure to the sun helps the liver convert Vitamin D precursors to the active form.

Girls between the ages of 11 and 24 need to take in a total of 1200 to 1500 mg of calcium a day. During pregnancy, a woman also needs to take in at least 1200 mg of calcium a day. A woman between age 25 and 50 should take in 1000 mg of calcium a day.

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After age 50, a woman should take between 1200 and 1500 mg of calcium a day. At all ages, between 1000 and 2000 units of Vitamin D is recommended. Too little Vitamin D keeps the body from using the calcium that is taken in the diet and through supplements. Too much Vitamin D causes the body to remove calcium from the bone and excrete it in the urine.

A simple and inexpensive way of providing Vitamin D and calcium is to take the appropriate number of Tums (check the label) and add a standard Vitamin D supplement. Be sure to count the amount of Vitamin D present in your multivitamin, if you take one.

After menopause, estrogen loss is a factor bone health. However, several recent studies links estrogen and progesterone preparations with an increased risk of stroke, heart attack, and some cancers. Also, some patients simply cannot take estrogen supplements for one reason or another. For these people, we have other medications that can be used. In some cases, even when a woman is taking estrogen supplements, she can develop osteoporosis.

Please feel free to talk to me at any time about your bone health. Keep in mind that men also need 1000 mg of calcium each day, as well as 1000-2000 units of Vitamin D. Men should also follow the same guidelines with regard to proper diet, restricting caffeine and alcohol, and smoking cessation.

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