

## Daily Union Article

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### Make No Bones About It!

“Make no bones about it” means that what is being said is honest and known to be true. So, make no bones about it, 54 million Americans age 50 and older suffer from osteoporosis according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF). The Foundation also estimates that half of all women and one in eight men will have an osteoporosis-related fracture at some time. Osteoporosis is often called the “silent disease” because there are many people who experience no symptoms until they have a bone fracture. The number of people diagnosed with this disease is on the rise. NOF projects that, at the current rate, there will be 64.4 million people affected by 2020 and 71.2% by 2030 in the United State. This is a projected 29% increase in just 20 years.

These statistics provide a strong case for the importance of education and prevention measures to help people understand what they can do to reduce the impact, if not prevent the disease from invading their life.

Osteoporosis means “porous bones.” With this disease, the bones are weakened by the loss of minerals (especially calcium) from their structure. It is a disease that cripples the body. As osteoporosis progresses, the bones remain the same size but become full of holes. This process happens slowly over many years. It is more common among women than men, both genders and all ethnicities are affected by the disease. Osteoporosis-related fractures most commonly occur in the spine, hip, or wrist. Injuries of this nature can significantly impact mobility and the ability to take care of oneself.

Taking preventative measures to reduce the risk of osteoporosis should be the task of people of all ages. Two important steps to maintain healthy bones are doing weight-bearing exercises and getting the proper amount of calcium each day.

There are other lifestyle changes that can help prevent osteoporosis.

- ✓ Avoid smoking. Those who smoke have a higher risk for osteoporosis. Studies have shown that smoking lowers the hormone called estrogen in a woman’s body and leads to weakening bones.
- ✓ If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Studies show that consuming less than three 8-oz glasses of alcohol per week will reduce the risk of this disease.
- ✓ Discuss all prescription medications taken with every physician seen. Certain medications used for an extended period of time can increase the risk for osteoporosis. Cortisone, thyroid, heparin, and anticonvulsants also decrease the

strength of bones. Physicians need to know every medication their patient is prescribed, even those prescribed by another doctor. This will help them look out for some of the dangers that come with taking medications over a long period of time.

- ✓ Reduce caffeine intake. Studies show that caffeine reduces calcium absorption, albeit in small amounts. For those who drink large amounts of caffeinated beverages, this impact will be greater.
- ✓ Become or remain physically active. The lack of weight-bearing exercises or physical activity in general is the one of the main contributors to osteoporosis. Physician approved aerobic exercise, walking, or weight-lifting are a few of the activities that will help maintain healthy bones.
- ✓ Read the label on over-the-counter (OTC) drugs to find out if they contribute to bone loss. Common OTC medications that can escalate bone loss include laxatives and antacids.

Osteoporosis and the fractured bones it causes is not a normal part of aging. With a healthy diet, physical activity, and avoiding choices known to increase risk, the number of cases of osteoporosis can be dramatically reduced. No matter the age, the healthy habits adopted now can help delay or reduce the risk of this “silent disease.”

It is important to get adequate levels of calcium in the diet. The mineral is critical to the body throughout the lifespan. Calcium is absorbed into the body early in life to make bones strong. As aging continues, calcium intake remains important to avoid bone loss.

Older people often do not get enough calcium from the foods they eat. It is important to that this high-risk population find ways to increase their calcium intake. In the U.S., the major source of calcium comes from dairy products. This includes milk, yogurt, cheese, and ice cream. To balance the need to take in calcium with healthy heart practices, it is recommended that low-fat or fat-free versions of these dairy products be consumed. There are vegetables that also serve as a good source of calcium: kale, romaine lettuce, and broccoli. Other foods, such as kidney beans, tofu, and nuts are good sources of calcium. Being intentional with diet choices rich in calcium is a great step toward the prevention of osteoporosis.

When there isn't enough calcium being consumed, the body will “rob” calcium from the bones to make sure it is keeping the blood in the body chemically balanced. Over time, the bones become porous and weak – making them more brittle and more susceptible to fractures.

The recommended intake of calcium for men ages 19-70 and women ages 19-50 is 1,000 mg of calcium in a day. Women over the age of 51 and men over the age of 70 need slightly more at a rate of 1,200 mg per day. Eating a diet that is naturally high in calcium as well as choosing foods that have calcium added will help meet these daily dietary needs.

Make no bones about it, adequate calcium intake is critical to your health and reduces the risk for getting this painful and debilitating disease!

For ideas on how to increase calcium intake, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

*Sources: National Osteoporosis Foundation,  
University of Florida Extension and  
West Virginia University Extension Service*