

## Exercise, lifestyle, and your bones

**Osteoporosis** is a disease that causes bones to become brittle and more likely to fracture (break). With osteoporosis, the bones lose density. Bone density is the amount of bone tissue in your bones. Exercise plays a key role in preserving bone density as you age.

### Why Exercise?

Make exercise a regular part of your life. It helps keep your bones strong and lower your risk of osteoporosis and fractures as you get older.

Before you begin an exercise program, talk with your health care provider if:

- You are older
- You have not been active for a while
- You have diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, or any other health condition

### How Much and What Type of Exercise?

To build up bone density, the exercise must make your muscles pull on your bones. These are called weight-bearing exercises. Some of them are:

- Brisk walks, jogging, playing tennis, dancing, or other weight-bearing activities such as aerobics and other sports
- Careful weight training, using weight machines or free weights

Weight-bearing exercises also:

- Increase bone density even in young people
- Help preserve bone density in women who are approaching menopause

To protect your bones, do weight-bearing exercises 3 or more days a week for a total of over 90 minutes a week.

If you are older, check with your provider before doing high-impact aerobics, such as step aerobics. This type of exercise may increase your risk for fractures if you have osteoporosis.

Low-impact exercises, like yoga and tai chi, do not help bone density very much. But they can improve your balance and lower your risk of falling and breaking a bone. And, even though they are good for your heart, swimming and biking do not increase bone density.

### Other Lifestyle Changes to Help Your Bones

If you smoke, quit. Also **limit how much alcohol you drink**. Too much alcohol can damage your bones and raise your risk of falling and breaking a bone.

If you do not get enough calcium, or if your body does not absorb enough calcium from the foods you eat, your body may not make enough new bone. Talk with your provider about **calcium and your bones**.

Vitamin D helps your body absorb enough calcium.

- Ask your provider if you should take a vitamin D supplement.
- You may need more vitamin D during the winter or if you need to avoid sun exposure to prevent skin cancer.
- Ask your provider about how much sun is safe for you.