

Protect Your Bones So They Can Last You a Lifetime

May is National Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention Month. Find out the most effective ways to prevent and potentially resolve this debilitating condition.

Many people may be surprised to learn that osteoporosis is not a condition of inadequate calcium intake but instead is a condition of overly rapid calcium loss. What on earth could cause our body to lose calcium???

The answer is simple...breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Our bodies work tirelessly to maintain a slightly alkaline pH in our blood and body tissues. It is critical in order for the millions of chemical reactions within us to take place.

Meat and dairy products are very high in the sulfur-containing amino acid, methionine. The digestion of this amino acid creates a very acidic environment, one which the body must work to correct. How is this acid neutralized? By tapping into the primary buffering system of the body - the bones. Bone material including calcium is excreted to offset this load of acid that was just ingested. Consuming highly acidic meals three times a day can cause a consistent drain on our bones.

Calcium supplementation is not the answer. Studies have found that no level of calcium supplementation will keep a person in positive calcium balance (retaining more than they are losing) when they are consuming a diet rich in animal products. Think of it as trying to fill a bathtub with water without closing the drain. No amount of water is going to fill that bathtub as long as the drain is open.

The high level of protein and the excretion of calcium also adds stress to the kidneys and calcium provides the building material for 95% of kidney stones, calcium oxalate kidney stones, as the calcium filters through our kidneys. Per John McDougall, MD, in otherwise healthy people, 1/3 of their kidney function is lost by the age of 70 due to the effects of consuming the rich, American diet.

So where on Earth are you going to find enough calcium if you're not consuming dairy products? Adequate but not excessive calcium is readily available in green, leafy vegetables and legumes (beans, peas, and lentils). It's easy to remember...beans and greens! According to John McDougall, MD, "the scientific literature clearly states that a calcium deficiency disease due to a low calcium intake from natural diets simply does not exist". What is also interesting is that the countries with the highest consumption of dairy products and calcium supplements have the highest incidence of osteoporosis worldwide and vice versa, the countries with little or no dairy consumption have the lowest incidences of osteoporosis.

Is there anything else that you can do for the health of your bones (as well as for the rest of your body)? If you smoke, quit. If you've never tried weight-bearing exercise, try it out (with your doctor's blessing of course). Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables that are rich in vitamin C as vitamin C helps to build collagen, which forms the basic network of tissue within our bones. And try to get 10-15 minutes of sunlight on your face and arms between 10 am and 2 pm, without sunscreen, as often as you can for a healthful source of vitamin D. Finally, limit sodium. Sodium lurks in the darndest places. Refraining from adding a lot in cooking or at the dinner table is helpful, but the greatest source of sodium by far is in packaged, processed foods.