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“HEALTH CLICK” **PLANNING FOR STRONG BONES STARTS NOW**

By Jane R. Snyder

Do you remember the skeleton on display in your Junior High School science classroom? Did it have a silly nickname or “smoke” an occasional cigarette between its yellowing teeth? Did you ever really consider how it related to the 206 bones in your own body?

The role that bones play is vital to your overall health. Without a strong skeleton you would be a mass of unstructured and unprotected organs, unable to move or function properly. Osteoporosis, a condition of aging that causes bones to become porous and prone to breaks, is one you need to be aware of, even at an early age, because this painful and debilitating disease has no warning signs. In the United States, over 8 million women suffer from osteoporosis.

Risk factors for osteoporosis include:

- a thin, small-boned frame
- body weight of less than 127 pounds
- a family history of osteoporosis
- being of Asian or Caucasian background (by comparison, African-American women have ½ the risk and Hispanic women have ⅓ the risk)

- smoking
- drinking more than 2 ounces of alcohol per day
- a sedentary lifestyle
- a diet containing less than 1000 mg of calcium per day
- drinking more than 2 sodas per day
- consuming excessive amounts of caffeine (from coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate) or
- taking medications (such as thyroid supplements, corticosteroids, antacids containing aluminum, and many others) that can leach calcium from your bones while solving other health problems.

Your bones grow as you do, and they age in the same way. From the time you are born into early adulthood, calcium is being deposited onto your skeleton. By the age of 35, your bones are at peak bone mass – the maximum amount of bone that you will have during your entire lifetime. After 35, you lose bone at a rate of 1% per year. After menopause, this rate will increase to 3% per year. Pregnancy and breast-feeding can also cause calcium loss to your bones.

A painless bone density test is used to establish a baseline for bone health. When repeated later in your life, the tests can be compared to help you and your physician determine if you are at increased risk of or are suffering from osteoporosis.

Evaluating your risk factors, and taking stock of your lifestyle and dietary habits, will help you recognize whether you need to make any necessary changes to prevent osteoporosis from becoming a problem later in your life.

If you value your strength and vitality, and you look forward to a long, healthy life, be as attentive to your bones as you are to the rest of your body.

For additional information on osteoporosis, talk to your healthcare provider or visit:

www.eatright.org
www.nof.org

www.fore.org
www.osteoporosis.org

