

Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

I hope you all had a good break and managed to keep exercising while our classes were in recess!

This month I'm focusing on Osteoporosis. The name of this disease is derived from the words *osteo* (bone) and *porosis* (porous). I'm sure you've all seen an Aero or Crunchie bar with its many holes. Well that's what a cross section of bone looks like, and when you get Osteoporosis, there can be more holes than solid mass! As you can imagine, this makes fractures occur very easily. In 2001 approximately 2 million Australians were estimated to be effected by osteoporosis, three-quarters of these were women.

Risk factors include increasing age, premature or surgical menopause, family history of osteoporosis, previous low trauma fracture, low calcium intake, low body weight, sedentary lifestyle, excessive alcohol, caffeine and smoking.

It is essential that we get adequate calcium in our diet. Many foods contain calcium besides dairy products, such as broccoli, soy, almonds, figs, apples, cabbage, bok choy, kidney beans, chick peas, papaya, brown rice, beetroot, oats, rye, sesame seeds, quinoa, alfalfa, eggplant, lentils, olives, dates and whole wheat, to name a few. Organic foods are best as they are richer in calcium than inorganic foods.

Vitamin D assists calcium absorption and can be found in sunflower seeds and mushrooms. However to ensure adequate intake of this vitamin it is important to get regular sunlight. It is best to do this early morning and late afternoon to avoid damage to your skin. Fifteen minutes a day is recommended to generate adequate vitamin D.

If you take a calcium supplement, it is best taken at night and away from any beverages containing caffeine. Caffeine encourages the kidneys to lose calcium in the urine.

Physical activity is one of the most important approaches in preventing Osteoporosis. Exercise can improve bone strength, muscular performance, flexibility and balance to decrease the risk of falls. Weight-bearing exercise increases bone mineral density as well as muscle mass. Weight bearing exercise should be carried out two times a week for 20-30 minutes.

Diagnosis of osteoporosis is done with a bone density test. There are no symptoms. Signs to look for are a decrease in height or a curved spine (dowager's hump). So if you have "lost" height over the last few years it would be a good idea to get a bone density test done.

Yet another good reason to keep exercising!

Yours in health,

Jeni