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Exercise and Your Bones

Bone is living tissue, just like muscle. Key bone-building years are those when your skeleton is growing – typically through your mid-20s. This is a critical period for bone health because what is built during these years will need to last a lifetime. After age 35, you gradually lose bone as part of the natural aging process.

While some loss of bone strength is common, even inevitable as people age, experts concur there are ways to counter bone loss. At the top of this list is exercise, especially weight-bearing activities. The goal of these activities is to stress the bone and cause it to become stronger. When you use your bones and muscles to hold a position against gravity, you are mechanically stressing the bone.

Bone in your body is constantly being broken down and replaced. The bone disease osteoporosis happens when the creation of new bone is not able to keep up with the loss of old bone. Osteoporosis means “porous bone.” It is a “silent” disease as you can’t feel your bones weakening. The first signs of osteoporosis you may notice are a stooped or hunched posture, loss of height, or a broken bone.

Movement is medicine for your bodies, especially your bones. Walking is an excellent exercise that promotes bone health, strengthening the spine and hips, in particular. Strength training also develops strong bones, and it doesn’t mean you need to lift super-heavy loads or follow a complex routine. Start at whatever level will challenge you slightly, even lifting a water bottle in each hand. Strive for good posture when sitting, standing, and doing any type of activity. Practicing good posture strengthens your core muscles, leading to better balance and steadiness. Core strengthening exercises, like the bridge ([verywellfit.com/how-to-do-the-bridge-exercise-3120738](https://www.verywellfit.com/how-to-do-the-bridge-exercise-3120738)) and plank ([youtube.com/watch?v=hObVFh0hJoU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hObVFh0hJoU)), can help strengthen your core muscles.

In addition to exercise, healthy eating plays a role in bone health, and your doctor might recommend hormone therapy.

Small Hops for Bone Health

Did you play hopscotch or jump rope when you were a child? It turns out these might be even better for your health as an adult, than they were when you were young.

Regular physical activity will keep bones strong and slow the rate of bone loss, even if you have fragile bones or osteoporosis. By leading an active lifestyle, you can significantly decrease your risk of falling and breaking a bone.

Weight-bearing exercise is anything that forces you to work against gravity and involves an impact with the floor or earth, requiring your feet and legs to support you. Some examples include brisk walking, hiking, jogging, marching, climbing stairs, weight training, dancing, yoga, and tennis. Gardening can be weight bearing if you carry a water can, walk in your yard, etc.

Another way to build stronger bones is to jump, stomp, and hop. These activities jar your bones a little, sending a message that they need to get stronger. So, have a little fun and act like a child again!

A recent study, reported in the American Journal of Health Promotion, reveals that jumping 10 times/twice a day provides greater bone-building benefits than running or jogging. This is not recommended for anyone who has osteoporosis, but for those who want to be proactive with exercise, this is great news!

If hopping is too difficult, start with marching or doing heel drops. Make sure you warm up muscles first by walking for a bit or marching in place. Here are tips for adding easy weight-bearing moves to your day.

Marching with impact: This movement is basic marching where you push or stomp your feet on the ground.

Heel Drop: Hold onto something about waist high for stability. Rise up on your toes, then drop your heels down abruptly.

Power Hop: You can hop on both legs or on one leg for maximum benefit. Hold onto something for stability if needed. Bend your knees for cushion when you land – never land on straight knees. You can do the hops quickly or rest between each hop. Start with 10 and work up to 20 hops twice daily. Learn how hopping can strengthen bones in this demonstration (youtube.com/watch?v=ARz_KlwwmJk).



Shift to More Seafood

If you can cook a fish fillet, you can have a healthful easy dinner on the table in 10 to 15 minutes. If you think of seafood as fast food, shifting to include more in your diet might be easier than you think.

Current Dietary Guidelines for Americans (dietaryguidelines.gov/resources/2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-online-materials) recommend at least 8 ounces of seafood each week to get essential omega-3 fatty acids, which keep your heart and brain healthy. These important nutrients are found in every kind of fish, and especially those high in fat, such as salmon, trout, sardines, herring, canned mackerel, canned light tuna, and oysters. Other foods contain omega-3s as well, in smaller amounts. These include walnuts, walnut oil, flaxseeds, flaxseed oil, pecans, canola oil, cod liver oil, soybeans, and most greens.

Cooking fish is fast and easy, but it can be intimidating to cook because it is delicate and easy to overcook. The best way to prevent this is to use a food thermometer and cook fish to an internal temperature of 145°F. To easily prepare fish, you can bake it, pan-sear, grill, or cook in a pouch of parchment paper or foil. Leftover fish, or any seafood, can be served the next day in tacos or on a bed of salad greens and vegetables.

Here is more advice about eating fish (fda.gov/media/102331/download?attachment).

Habit Shift Challenge

Think about something you do everyday without even thinking about it. Could you do 10 heel drops or power hops right after you brush your teeth? This is an example of how you can form a new habit by linking it to something you already do automatically.

Blackened Salmon Salad

Makes 4 Servings

Dressing ingredients:

- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 3 tablespoons orange juice
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 tablespoon honey
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro or parsley

Salmon ingredients:

- 1½ pounds salmon, skin removed, cut into 4 portions
- 1½ teaspoons blackening seasoning, or other seasoning blend
- 2 teaspoons olive or canola oil

Salad ingredients:

- 6 cups shredded romaine lettuce or mixed spring greens
- 1 large mango, peeled and cut into bite-sized chunks
- 14-ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 1 cup shredded red cabbage
- ½ cup diced red onion or green onions



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Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Wash herbs, lettuce, bell pepper, cabbage, and onions by gently rubbing under cold running water. Prepare vegetables, mango, and herbs.
3. Prepare dressing: Whisk garlic, lime juice, orange juice, honey, and salt in a medium bowl. Whisk in olive oil gradually in a steady stream. Stir in cilantro.
4. Prepare salmon: Pat dry with a paper towel, then sprinkle all over with seasoning. Heat a large heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Brush with oil. Lay salmon in the hot skillet and let sear, undisturbed until the bottom has a blackened crust – about 4 to 6 minutes. Carefully flip over, reduce heat, and continue cooking until salmon reaches an internal temperature of 145°F.
5. Prepare salad: Combine lettuce, mango, black beans, red pepper, cabbage, and onion in a large bowl. Drizzle dressing over the salad and toss to coat.
6. Divide salad among four large plates. Top with salmon portion and serve immediately.

Nutrition Information per 1 serving:

540 calories; 22 g total fat (3.5 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat); 46 g carbohydrates; 42 g protein; 11 g fiber; 400 mg sodium; 20 g sugar.

Walk Kansas Webinars

Missed a webinar or need to rewatch? Click the link below to view the recordings!

<https://www.walkkansas.org/newsletter/2024.html>

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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