Tips for healthy bones

Healthcare professionals call osteoporosis a silent disease as people with the condition may not be aware of it until they fracture a bone.

Osteoporosis refers to the weakening of skeletal bones due to a reduction in bone density, which leads to an increased risk of fractures from even minor trauma, says Dr Jonathan Ti, chief medical officer at DTAP Clinic.

People's bone density and bone health have been affected during the pandemic as they exercise less and stay home.

First, people are getting less sunlight, which "is essential for the formation of vitamin D in the skin cells, which plays a vital role in calcium absorption and healthy bone formation", says Dr Ti.

A low level of activity is another problem. "Weight-bearing exercises and other forms of resistance training have been shown to improve bone density and reduce the risk of osteoporosis and fracture," he adds.

Dr Ti suggests getting outside in the sun for at least 20 minutes a day; doing weight-bearing or resistance exercises for at least 30 minutes three times a week; and eating a variety of foods high in calcium and vitamin D, including green leafy vegetables, beans, soya milk and fish like salmon and sardines.

Dr Ang Seng Bin, president of Osteoporosis Society (Singapore) and president of Asian Federation of Osteoporosis Societies, suggests following the Shape Up formula for bone health.

Stop smoking.

Healthy eating.

Alcohol

in moderation. If one does not drink, do not start.

Peaceful

mind, improving one's situational awareness to reduce the risk of accidents and falls.

Exercise regularly, targeting not just the bones, but also muscle mass and balance. Walking and running are good for strengthening bones. Planking, taiji and yoga are good exercises for developing core muscles and balance.

Understand the risk. A family history of osteoporosis, prior fractures, irregular periods or early menopause can increase one's risk of developing osteoporosis.

Preventative health through bone mineral density scans to check whether one has osteoporosis. Dr Ang suggests doing these scans at age 65 (for women) and age 70 (for men), or earlier if one is in a higher-risk group. Akshita Nanda