Ways to bolster bone health

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BONES play many roles in the body - providing structure, protecting organs, anchoring muscles and storing calcium, they are a living part of your body and despite their strength, they are flexible.



Healthy bones are dense and strong and when you're young, your body makes new bone faster than it breaks down old bone, increasing bone mass (the amount of bone tissue within the bones).

Most people reach their peak bone mass around age 30, after that, bone remodelling continues, but you lose slightly more bone mass than you gain.

Bone health should begin in childhood when diet and plenty of exercise help children achieve their highest possible peak bone mass.

The more bone mass you have when you reach adulthood, the less likely you will have weak and breakable bones at an older age.

While building strong and healthy bones during childhood and adolescence is crucial, you can also take steps during adulthood to protect bone health.

Improve your bone health

• Eat healthy foods and include at least three servings of calcium rich food like dairy products, almonds, broccoli, kale, canned salmon with bones, sardines and soy products such as tofu every day. For adults aged 19 to 50 and men aged 51 to 70, the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) is 1000mg of calcium daily. This increases to 1200mg daily for women age 51 and older and men age 71 and older.

• Get enough vitamin D - your body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium and is found in salmon, trout, whitefish, tuna, mushrooms, eggs, milk and cereals. For most Australians, the primary source of vitamin D is exposure to sunlight. For fair-skinned people, spending five to 10 minutes in the sun before 10am or after 3pm in summer, or up to half an hour in the

middle of the day in winter will provide enough vitamin D. If your skin is darker, or you are 70 or older, you may need to spend longer outside.

• Keep active with weight-bearing exercises like walking, jogging, climbing stairs or tai chi classes.

• Reduce or stop smoking - smoking, or having a smoking history, increases your risk of broken bones. If you currently smoke, the best thing you can do for your bones and overall health is to stop as soon as possible.

• Drink alcohol in moderation - for women, avoid drinking more than one alcoholic drink daily. For men, avoid drinking more than two alcoholic drinks daily.

Being underweight or overweight can increase your risk of broken bones.

Signs of poor bone health include stooped posture, loss of height and unexplained back pain.

Broken bones caused by a minor fall or slight injury also indicate poor bone health - if your bones are fragile, you may experience damaged or fractured bones caused by everyday movement and pressure.

Osteoporosis is a chronic disease in which your bones become hollow and fragile so that even a minor injury or fall can result in a broken bone.

Speak to your doctor about your bone health if you have a family history of osteoporosis or are over 50 and experiencing any signs of poor bone health.