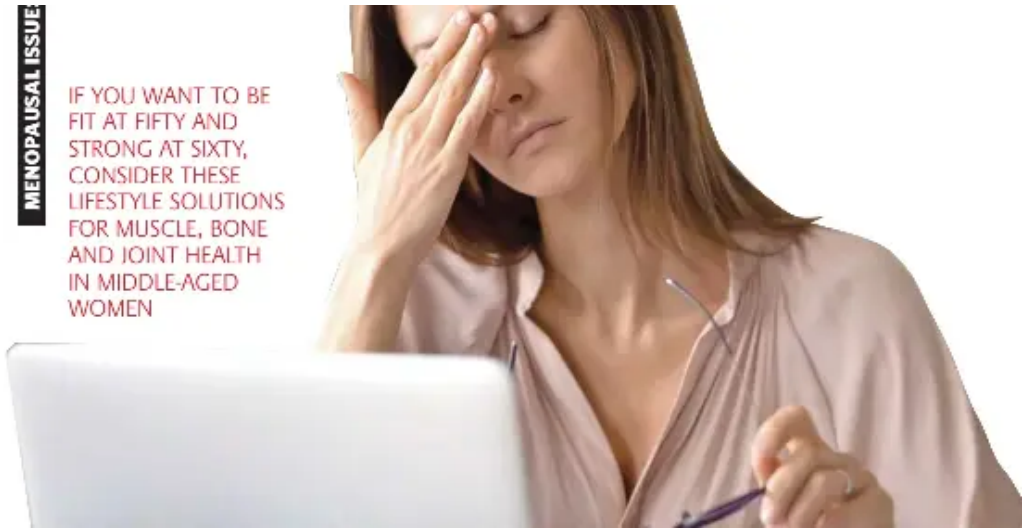
Foods for bone health

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Strong bones are the foundation of a healthy and active life. From childhood through old age, our bones support our body, protect vital organs, and store essential minerals like calcium and phosphorus. However, with age, hormonal changes, and lifestyle factors, which are more often seen in women, bone density tends to decline, increasing the risk of osteoporosis. The good news is that what we eat plays an important role in maintaining and even improving bone health.



Let's dig deep directly into the topic and explore the best foods for bone health.

Calcium-rich foods

Whenever there is a talk about bone health, the first nutrient that comes to our mind is calcium. About 99% of the body's calcium is stored in bones and teeth. If the diet is low in calcium, the body draws it out from the bones, making them weak. Foods that increase calcium levels are:

Dairy products like milk, yogurt, and cheese. These are classic and easily absorbed sources.

Plant-based options, like, ragi (finger millet), sesame seeds, almonds, and leafy greens like spinach and kale are excellent for those who avoid dairy.

Fortified foods such as fortified plant milk and breakfast cereals can also bridge the gap.

Vitamin D foods

Without Vitamin D, calcium absorption is incomplete. Sunlight is the best natural source, but diet also helps. Foods like, fatty fish such as salmon, egg yolk, and fortified foods like fortified milk or orange juice also support bone health. Always get your Vitamin

D levels assessed to rule out any deficiency.

Protein for bone strength

Protein are not only important for growth, maintenance and immunity but it also makes up about one-third of bone mass and helps repair tissues. Strong muscles also protect bones from injury. A balanced intake of protein-rich foods, ensures strong muscles that support the skeleton and reduce fracture risks.

Pulses, lentils, and beans provide plant-based protein. Grains like, quinoa and nuts, like, almonds, walnuts and seeds, like, chia or flax are great sources of proteins.

Soy products, like, soybeans, soya chunks, and tofu help in both protein and isoflavone intake, which benefits postmenopausal women. Eggs, fish, poultry, dairy and lean meats are excellent animal sources of proteins.

Other bone-building nutrients Magnesium and phosphorus: Magnesium helps convert Vitamin D into its active form, while phosphorus works closely with calcium to strengthen bones. Whole grains like bajra, jowar, and brown rice, along with legumes and nuts, supply these important minerals.

Vitamin K, found in greens like coriander, curry leaves, and spinach improves calcium binding in bones. Omega-3 fatty acids, found in flaxseeds, walnuts, and chia seeds, support bone health by reducing inflammation.

Lifestyle matters

Along with eating well, lifestyle plays a big role. Regular exercises such as walking, or strength training stimulate bone growth. Avoid excess salt, cola, and packaged junk foods, as they leach calcium from bones.

To conclude, bone health is not built in a day, it's the result of consistent choices over a lifetime. A diet rich in bone supportive nutrients can go a long way in keeping bones strong and flexible. Whether it's enjoying a bowl of yogurt with fruit, sprinkling seeds over salads, or regular exercise, every small step adds up to a stronger foundation for years to come.

If you are a woman in your 40s or 50s, you may experience stiff joints, sore knees, and weaker muscles. These are called musculoskeletal issues and often occur during perimenopause and postmenopause.

These issues are not just part of aging, they are mainly due to a decline in estrogen, a hormone important for bones, cartilage, and muscles.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated October as World Menopause Awareness Month and World Menopause Day is observed on October 18. The primary aim of this observance is to raise awareness about menopause and the various support mechanisms available to enhance health and well-being of women.

The theme for World Menopause Day 2025 is 'Lifestyle Medicine', a medical specialty grounded in evidence that utilises therapeutic lifestyle changes to prevent, manage, and potentially reverse numerous health conditions. Lifestyle medicine empowers menopausal women and healthcare professionals to make informed and sustainable health decisions by addressing the fundamental causes of menopause.

Lifestyle medicine uses lifestyle changes such as diet, exercise, sleep, and stress control to help with menopausal women's midlife mystery, the musculoskeletal issues. When applied to menopausal discomfort, these principles become your secret weapon.

Movement as medicine RESISTANCE TRAINING (THE BONE BUILDER):

Movement plays a crucial role in maintaining health during menopause, acting as a form of medicine for the body. Despite joint discomfort, staying active remains essential for overall well-being.

Resistance training emerges as a powerful tool to combat the effects of reduced estrogen levels on bone density. By engaging in weightlifting, using resistance bands, or performing body-weight exercises like squats (partial or chair assisted), wall sits and modified push-ups (on knees

or wall), light to moderate dumbbell workouts, three times a week, women can effectively maintain strong bones and muscles, reducing the risk of osteoporosis. This type of exercise not only strengthens the skeletal system but also improves muscle tone and overall body composition.

IF YOU WANT TO BE FIT AT FIFTY AND STRONG AT SIXTY, CONSIDER THESE LIFESTYLE SOLUTIONS FOR MUSCLE, BONE AND JOINT HEALTH IN MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN

LOW-IMPACT MOVEMENT:

Complementing resistance training, low-impact movement serves as a joint lubricator, offering a gentler approach to physical activity. Low impact exercises are physical activities that place minimal stress on the joints, making them ideal for women who are midlife and older women, re covering from injury, beginners, or managing menopause related bone and joint pain.

Activities such as walking, swimming, cycling, yoga, tai chi, pilates, rowing machine, low impact dance such as Zumba or stretching routines provide the benefits of exercise without placing excessive strain on the joints and at the same time add more flexibility and balance. These low impact exercises promote better blood flow and joint lubrication, which can alleviate stiffness and discomfort associated with menopause.

Additionally, low-impact activities often improve cardiovascular health, contributing to a more comprehensive approach to menopausal wellness. By incorporating both resistance training and low-impact movements into their routine, women can address multiple aspects of their physical health during this transitional period. LIFESTYLE-BASED MOVEMENTS: Activities such as stair climbing, gardening, hiking, and functional movements (reaching, bending, getting up from chair) are part of lifestyle movements. Hiking is walking on natural trails or terrains and not on paved roads, usually done in the forest, hills or country side. It can range from short flat trails to challenging high altitude routes. Hiking has tremendous benefits such as improving heart health.

Nourishing your body through diet and nutrition

Your kitchen can play a crucial role in supporting your musculoskeletal health.

PRIORITISE PROTEIN: Maintaining muscle mass during menopause can be challenging. To support your muscles, include high-quality protein sources such as lean meat, fish, beans, lentils, or dairy in every meal.

THE BONE-HEALTH DUO:

Ensure you get sufficient calcium and vitamin D. Dairy such as milk, yogurt, Greek yogurt, and cheese are excellent source of calcium. Dairy is the powerhouse of easily absorbed calcium. Many yogurts and some types of cheeses (swiss cheese) are fortified with vitamin D. GREENS: In addition to dairy, incorporating dark leafy greens are a good source of calcium. Dark green leafy vegetables commonly available and eaten in Oman, sometimes as part of traditional or Zanzibari-influenced cuisine are green cabbage, arugula (jarjeer), parsley and beet greens.

GREEN CABBAGE: Outer leaves can be dark green and are used in Omani recipes like a vegetable Shorba (soup) or sauteed dishes.

Arugula (Jarjeer): A popular leafy green in the region, often used in salads.

PARSLEY: Although often used as an herb or garnish, it is a very common dark green leafy vegetable mentioned in the local context.

BEET GREENS: The edible leaves of the beetroot plant, also available locally.

Influenced by its historical connections with Zanzibar, which is reflected in Omani cuisine, you might encounter coconut-simmered spinach. This cooking method is recognised as a common feature in restaurants with Zanzibari influences and in Swahili households across Oman.
Kale, collard greens, and bok choy are considered excellent sources because their calcium is easily absorbed (high bioavailability). Both kale and collard greens are available in major supermarkets such as lulu in Oman.
Fatty fishes like sardines and salmons provides a naturally excellent source of Vitamin D along with significant calcium if you consume them with bones. Canned sardines and salmons with bones are high in both calcium (from the soft, edible bones) and Vitamin D. COMBATTING INFLAMMATION: Foods with omega-3s (like salmon and walnuts) and antioxidants (like colourful berries and vegetables) reduce joint pain and stiffness.
Stress and sleep: The recovery formula
MASTER SLEEP: Get 7-9 hours of quality sleep. During deep sleep, the body repairs muscles and lowers inflammation. Have a regular, calming bedtime routine. Discomfort can worsen when a person is tired or stressed, and there is a biological reason for this. Chronic stress raises cortisol levels, which are pro-inflammatory and can hinder the body's repair processes. MANAGE CORTISOL: Pain can feel worse when tired or stressed. Chronic stress raises cortisol levels, which is inflammatory and slows body repair. Techniques like deep-breathing exercises, meditation, long walks, or simple hobbies can significantly lower stress levels, thereby reducing overall inflammation and pain perception. PHASE OF LIFE: Menopause is a phase in life. By proactively following the pillars of Lifestyle Medicine, you can strengthen your bones, rebuild your muscles, and significantly improve your quality of life, ensuring your midlife journey is defined by vitality, not just aches.