

CALCIUM, VITAMIN D, AND OSTEOPOROSIS

What Is Osteoporosis?

Bone is a living tissue, and it is constantly changing. Old bone is removed, often called "resorption," while new bone is being formed. After age 30, the resorption of old bone happens faster than the formation of new bone. If lost bone cannot be replaced fast enough, then osteoporosis can develop.

Am I At Risk For Osteoporosis?

Some factors that put people at a higher risk for developing osteoporosis include age, being female or fair-skinned, having a small body frame, and having a family history of fractures. Some risk factors are easy to change once you are aware of them. Some of these include having the right amounts of sex hormones (estrogen for women and testosterone for men), being physically active, not smoking, and avoiding the use of alcohol and caffeine. Once you have reached middle adulthood, the trick is to slow the loss of bone as much as possible by changing the risk factors you can.

How Important Is Calcium?

One of the most important ways to prevent osteoporosis is to get enough calcium and vitamin D. Most of the body's calcium is stored in the bone. If the body doesn't get enough calcium each day, it compensates by taking calcium from the bone to use in the blood. So, it is very important to get enough calcium every day, preferably from food. Foods which are good sources of calcium include dark green leafy vegetables. Broccoli has 80 mg calcium per cup and turnip greens have 100 mg calcium per 1/2 cup. Other foods rich in calcium include tofu, almonds, dried figs, and sardines. If you cannot get enough calcium from the foods you eat, then taking a calcium supplement is a good idea. Supplements are best absorbed when taken with food. Space out the intake of calcium throughout the day since only 500 mg can be absorbed at one time. It's recommended that adults over 50 years of age get 1200 mg to 1500 mg of calcium from foods and supplements each day.

What About Vitamin D?

Vitamin D is produced in the skin when exposed to sunlight. It is essential for the absorption of calcium. As people age, there is a decrease in the production of vitamin D. There is also less vitamin D production in people who do not get much sunlight, by spending most of their time indoors. A vitamin D supplement is probably not necessary if you get at least 10 to 15 minutes of sunlight each day. If not, then you may consider a supplement that provides 400 IU to 800 IU of vitamin D each day.

Are There Treatments for Osteoporosis?

Some medications used to treat osteoporosis include estrogens, *Fosamax*, *Actonel*, or *Evista* and *Miacalcin*. It is very important to continue to get adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D, through diet or supplements, even if you are taking prescription medication. These medications work best if there is enough calcium and vitamin D in your system.

For additional information on this and other health issues, visit: MedlinePlus.gov