

HOLISTIC HEALTH NOTEBOOK

Proper diet can help keep bones strong

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Martha was feeling fine. Time for her annual physical exam, that's all.

"You're looking great, Martha!" Doc closed her file and set it on the desk. "Except your bones. You have osteopenia - some bone loss."

She was stunned. She had always taken care of herself. Ate right. Exercised daily. Aren't bones supposed to last a lifetime?

One of the popular misconceptions about bone density is that we simply load up on calcium. While we like the idea of "a pill for every ill," building strong bones isn't as simple as a calcium supplement. Bones are dynamic tissue. Minerals and other nutrients are constantly being reabsorbed, or drawn out of the bones, and absorbed back in. The balance of nutrients in the bone matrix is dependent upon diet and lifestyle.

Fortunately, there is much we can do to ensure the health of bones all the way through our senior years.

Dietary habits that rob bones

One of the most common problems related to bone health is our love affair with acid-forming diets. When the diet is

overly acid (high protein, excessive grains, sugars, soft drinks, alcohol, as well as stress and other factors), the body alkalizes the blood by pulling minerals out of the bones. Maintaining the proper pH is critically important to health.

A high protein diet is destined to contribute to the loss of bone minerals because, with a heavy emphasis on animal-based protein foods, it is a highly acid diet. By the same token, a diet that focuses primarily on grains can have the same effect.

How, then, should we balance the diet to maximize bone health? Lots of vegetables, moderate amounts of fruit, along with protein foods help maintain bone density by reducing the acid load and providing the body with a variety of minerals.

Remember that the various organs and systems of the body do not have competing interests. In other words, a diet that is good for the bones is also good for the heart and brain. A diet that is optimum for permanent weight loss is also good for lasting health.

Beverages for the bones

While ad agencies would like to have you believe that "milk does a body good," that may be true only if you are a calf. Cow's milk was intended to build strong, big calves. Cow's milk is a rich source of calcium but according to the World Health Organization, up to 80 percent of the world's population is intolerant



to dairy products. Countries that consume far less dairy than the U.S. have far less osteoporosis, probably because their diets typically focus on lots of vegetables. Again, eat those greens!

"So, Martha." Doc was already getting out his prescription pad. "What is the prescription for healthy bones?"

"I know, I know," she sighed. "Reduce the sugar. Cut out the soda. Maybe one cup of coffee each morning. But lots of

vegetables! And moderate amounts of protein! That's not so bad, is it?"

Diet isn't the only factor in bone health, however. Next week, we'll examine lifestyle issues related to bones. ■

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