
Eating Disorders and Your Bones: Get the Facts

Strong bones matter! Did you know that if you have, or have ever had, an eating disorder, you might be at an increased risk of osteoporosis? It is important to know the facts about osteoporosis:

- Osteoporosis is a disease that affects women and men. The disease causes bones to get thin and weak, and become more likely to break.
- It is often called a "silent disease" because you cannot feel or see your bones getting thinner.
- The most common bones that break as a result of osteoporosis are in the spine, wrist, and hip.
- A broken bone can be painful, interfere with daily activities, and sometimes have serious consequences.
- Stress fractures are small breaks in bones, often from overuse, that can sideline athletes.

What is the relationship between eating disorders and bone health?

- Early recognition, diagnosis, and treatment of an eating disorder are the best ways to prevent bone loss and reduce your risk of osteoporosis.
- Eating disorders can be harmful to your bones at any age. When eating disorders happen during youth, bones may not grow to be as dense and strong as they should. The earlier eating disorders occur, and the longer they last, the greater the risk of bone loss and osteoporosis.
- Good nutrition is critical throughout your life. If you restrict your eating, your body may be deprived of many nutrients necessary for strong bones (such as calories, protein, calcium, and vitamin D).
- Poor nutrition, excessive exercise, and/or purging (such as by vomiting or laxative abuse) can cause an unhealthy, low body weight. When this happens, less weight bears on your bones. This can lead to bone loss and potential loss of muscle that supports and strengthens your bones.
- Eating disorders can cause changes in hormone levels that are necessary to build and maintain strong bones. In women, a regular period usually means your hormone levels are normal. Absence of menstrual periods may get in the way of bone building, speed up bone loss, and increase the risk of osteoporosis. There is no evidence that use of birth control pills to regulate menstrual cycles will prevent bone loss or osteoporosis. In men, the impact of eating disorders on hormone levels is not known.

What can you do to promote stronger bones for life?

- Be proactive and get help to treat your eating disorder. Treatment is available and recovery is possible. For more information, contact The National Eating Disorders Association Helpline at **1-800-931-2237** (www.nationaleatingdisorders.org).
- Reach and maintain a stable, healthy body weight with the amount of body fat needed to normalize your hormone levels (and restore normal periods in women).
- Eat a varied, nutrient-rich diet that provides the recommended amount of calories, protein, and other nutrients. A certified dietitian/nutritionist (CDN) can help you find the eating plan that will work best for you.
- Consume the recommended amount of calcium each day by including a calcium-rich food at each meal or snack. If it is not possible for you to get all of the calcium you need from food alone, ask your health care provider if a calcium supplement is right for you.
- Speak to your health care provider about how to get the recommended amount of vitamin D; a supplement may be needed. Vitamin D is necessary to help your body use calcium to build and maintain stronger bones.
- Follow your health care provider's advice about physical activity. Physical activity may be limited until your weight is restored. When your weight is restored, moderate physical activity can help build bone in youth, slow bone loss in adulthood, and help improve muscle strength, posture, and balance at all ages.
- Do not smoke -- and quit if you do smoke. Avoid underage drinking, and limit alcohol intake as an adult. Smoking and alcohol abuse are both harmful to your bones.