

Children and Teens: How You Build Strong Bones for Life

Get the facts:

Your body builds bone faster now than at any other time in life.

Your bones reach their maximum strength and thickness between ages 16 and 25.

If you have strong bones, you are less likely to have stress fractures (tiny cracks in bones).

Stress fractures can interfere with your everyday activities and athletics and sports.

Stronger bones now will lower your risk of getting thin, weak bones later in life.

What actions are good for my bone health?



Eat a variety of foods. Try to fill half your plate with colorful fruits and vegetables. The other half should be whole grains and lean proteins (chicken, fish, eggs, and beans).



Drink bone healthy beverages. Try for drinks rich in calcium at each meal: low-fat milk, and beverages with calcium added, such as orange juice and almond, coconut, or soy beverages. Limit drinking low-calcium beverages, such as sodas, sports drinks, and coffee.



Eat foods with calcium. Include a food rich in calcium at each meal or snack. Examples: low-fat dairy foods, dark green leafy vegetables, and foods with calcium added.



Know the sources of vitamin D. These include: fatty fish (salmon, tuna); foods with vitamin D added, such as milk and some non-dairy beverages; and dairy items such as yogurt and cheese. Since only a few foods contain vitamin D, you may need a supplement. Talk to your doctor about the best way for you to get the recommended amount of vitamin D.



Be active. Physical activity, at least 60 minutes a day, will help build strong bones. Start at an early age and continue your activity to keep your bones strong.



Protect your bones against injury. Always wear a seatbelt in any moving vehicle. Use protective equipment when biking, skating, and participating in sports.



Avoid smoking and drinking any alcohol – especially if you are not the legal age to do either. Both of these can harm your bones!



Get help for eating disorders. When eating disorders happen during youth, bones may not grow to be as strong. The earlier eating disorders happen and the longer they last, the greater the risk to your bones. It is important to speak to your parents or healthcare provider. For more information, contact The National Eating Disorders Association Helpline at 800-931-2237 (HYPERLINK "<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>" www.nationaleatingdisorders.org).