

Being Active When You Have Osteoporosis

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Do you want to feel better, move better and sleep better? Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward better health – even just a few minutes!

People with osteoporosis or osteopenia (low bone mass) can reduce their risk of falls and fractures through the right kinds of physical activity. Research is ongoing to determine the best exercise plan for healthy bones. Currently, experts recommend weight-bearing activity (while on your feet) and strength training to help your bones become stronger and help prevent falls.



Getting Started

Keep It Simple

Sit less and move around more! Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Take the stairs. Take opportunities to load your bones throughout the day.

Talk with Experts

Talk to your health care team before you start a new exercise program. What is your FRAX score? Have you had a fracture? Are there exercises you should avoid?

Build a Plan

Include both strength training and weight-bearing activities. A physical therapist (PT) or certified exercise professional with expertise in bone health can design a customized program for you.

Manage Your Risk

Get advice about other risk factors that affect your bones, such as nutrition (calcium, protein, calories), smoking, caffeine and alcohol intake. Take your prescribed medications.

Encourage the children and teenagers in your life to play sports, dance and do recreational activities they enjoy. Bone is most sensitive to loading during this time of life. They will build stronger bones to help protect them from developing osteoporosis later.

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

Osteoporosis Tips and Cautions

Good posture is important while sitting, standing, walking and exercising. A PT or exercise professional can teach you how to reduce stress on your spine and joints through muscle balance, proper movement and body positioning.

Avoid activities that involve excessive twisting or bending, especially if you have low bone density in your spine. For example, use caution with activities like yoga or Pilates or take a break during stressful postures or positions.

To build strength in a certain bone, you must do exercises that involve and challenge that specific area. For example, lifting weights to make your arms stronger will not prevent a hip fracture.

Make sure that you're getting enough calcium, vitamin D and calories to support your bone metabolism. If you're not sure about this, check with your health care provider or a registered dietitian.

Ask your health care provider about follow-up bone density measurements to track your progress. If needed, you can adjust your activity program and care plan.

Weight-Bearing Activity

Weight-bearing activity helps load your bones to keep them strong and improves balance. Swimming and cycling are great for general fitness, but they are NOT weight-bearing. If you enjoy those activities, include other options where you're moving on your feet (such as walking, marching, dancing, aerobics, tennis or, if approved, jumping/hopping).

What?

Repetitive-impact weight-bearing activity

How often?

4-5 days/week

How hard?

Moderate- to high-intensity depending on ability and bone/joint health

How much?

Start w/5 impacts. Gradually build up to 30-60 total impacts over the day

OR

Start w/5-10 minutes of weight-bearing activity – build up to 20 - 45 minutes/day.

Remember: There are many different ways to apply impact to bones. Start gently. Some people with painful conditions such as arthritis may never reach high-impact loading. But just being weight-bearing is important.

Weight-Bearing Activity Tips and Cautions

- Choose what kind of impact is best for you (low or high) with feedback from your health care provider and based on your overall/bone health, fitness level and joints. If you have arthritis in your knees or hips, focus more on strength training.
- Start with foot stomping or marching. Then progress to heel drops (go up on your toes and drop onto your heels). Begin gently to avoid injury. If approved by your health care provider, gradually build up to hops or jumps. Get expert guidance.
- If you have poor balance, hold onto stationary supports or try using walking poles.
- Give your body time to recover between sessions. Short bursts of challenging activity, followed by rest periods, are more effective than long slow sessions.
- Talk to your health care provider right away if activities cause bone pain.

Strength Training

Challenging your muscles can help to strengthen your bones. Strength training, particularly in your legs and trunk, plays an important role in preventing falls. You will also improve your ability to do daily and fun activities without injuring yourself.

What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body weight (for example, chair sit-to-stands or kitchen counter push-ups).

How often?

2-3 days/week
*Rest day in between

How hard?

Start w/12 repetitions at light-medium effort. Gradually build to hard effort for just 8 repetitions.

How much?

8-10 repetitions for each major muscle group. After 2 weeks, increase to 2 sets.

Remember: Focus first on learning good technique - then increase resistance. Get help from a certified exercise professional or physical therapist. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly.

Resistance Training Tips and Cautions

- For the most benefit to your bones, work up to challenging loads. When possible, do exercises standing instead of sitting.
- Change your routine every couple of months. Bones respond well to variety.
- Be cautious about exercises involving bending and twisting at the hips and trunk.

Balance

Balance activities improve your ability to resist forces that could cause you to fall. They also lower your risk of injury if a fall does happen. Simply getting stronger will help too, especially in your legs, stomach and back. Train in an uncluttered area and use a chair or wall for support if needed. A certified exercise professional can guide you safely through balance training. Here are some examples:

Standing stability

When standing, gradually reduce your base of support: 1) Stand with both feet together and hands on your chest. 2) Stand with one foot forward and the other back. 3) Stand-heel-to- toe. 4) Stand on one leg. Hold a position for 15-30 seconds.

Active challenges

Do movements that disturb your center of gravity: 1) Walk on a line. 2) Walk heel-to- toe. 3) Walk on your toes. 4) Turn in a circle or move in different patterns.

Other Types of Physical Activity

These activity options are important for your overall health and may reduce your risk of falls or fracture.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activities such as walking, cycling or using an elliptical trainer are important for heart health and stamina. Do these activities for 30 -60 minutes (preferably weight- bearing) at least 3 days/ week at a moderate- intensity.

Flexibility

Stretch your muscles 5-7 days/week. Stretch to the point of feeling tightness. Hold for 10 -30 seconds (30 - 60 seconds for older adults). For example, stretch your chest, thighs and calves to help your posture.

Change it Up

If your bones can handle it, activities with changes of speed and direction can be good, such as aerobic dance routines, tennis, pickleball, dancing or soccer. Ask your health care provider if these would be safe for you.

Posture

You can stand taller by doing exercises to strengthen your back and stretch your chest muscles. A PT or exercise professional can help you achieve muscle balance for better posture.

More Help

To learn more about being active with osteoporosis or osteopenia, check out these websites: • National Osteoporosis Foundation: [nof.org/patients/fracturesfall-prevention/safe-movement-exercise-videos/](https://www.nof.org/patients/fracturesfall-prevention/safe-movement-exercise-videos/)

Go to [acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro](https://www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro) to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

How will I get started **this week?** _____
