Can exercise help to build strong bones?

Exercise is really important for keeping your children’s bones strong and an active childhood will help to build bones and prevent osteoporosis in later life.

Five exercises to build strong bones:

• Team sports such as football or netball are a great way of getting children involved in fitness from a young age.
• Skipping is good for children and young people because it adds some impact to bones. Aim for 50 jumps a day or skipping for five minutes each day.
• Jogging is great exercise and a fantastic way of building bone in both the hip and spine in younger people.
• Tennis or badminton are other high-impact, enjoyable sports that build bone density.
• Exercise to music classes and dancing are fun ways to boost bone health.

For osteoporosis information and support contact our Helpline:

0808 800 0035
nurses@nos.org.uk

To order an information pack or other publications:

01761 471771
info@nos.org.uk

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Building stronger bones

Our genes are the key to deciding the potential size and strength of our skeleton, but the way we live our life can also play a part in determining the amount of bone we invest in our ‘bone bank’ during childhood, and how much we retain in later life. Helping your children to build strong bones can be easy if you are careful about what they eat and if you make sure they lead an active lifestyle.

Can a healthy, balanced diet help to build strong bones?

Food and drink are really important for children and it is important to make sure that the food you and your kids eat today will help to keep your skeletons strong for the future.

Try and plan meals which include some of the following:

- Fruit and vegetables – at least five portions a day.
- Carbohydrates like bread, potatoes, pasta and cereals.
- Milk, dairy products or other natural sources of calcium.
- Protein such as meat, fish, eggs, pulses, nuts and seeds.
- Plenty of water or other healthy drinks.

Why do children need to build strong bones?

During childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, when the skeleton is growing, it is vitally important to maximise bone strength. By ‘banking’ plenty of bone in these years, it puts the skeleton in a better position to withstand the bone loss that occurs with advancing age.

The good news is, your children can build strong bones by taking plenty of weight-bearing exercise and eating a well-balanced, calcium-rich diet.

Why are strong bones important?

Strong bones are essential for long-term health and well-being. One good reason to make sure your kids are building strong bones is to lower their chances of developing osteoporosis in later life. Osteoporosis is the fragile bone disease that causes painful, disabling fractures.

Calcium

Calcium is essential for strong teeth and bones because it gives them strength and rigidity. Our bodies contain about 1kg of this vital mineral and ninety-nine per cent of it is found in our bones and teeth. Most people should be able to get enough calcium through healthy eating.

Foods that contain calcium include:

- Milk
- Yoghurt
- Cheddar cheese
- Sardines
- Okra
- Broccoli and peas
- Kidney beans
- Dried figs

Vitamin D

You need vitamin D to help your body absorb calcium. The best source is sunlight, which your body uses to make this important vitamin in your skin. For adults, 10 minutes of sun exposure to the face and arms without sunscreen once or twice a day, every day between May and September, will increase vitamin D and help to keep bones healthy. Always take care not to burn, especially during strong sunshine in the middle of the day.

Due to a current lack of evidence about appropriate sun exposure in childhood, we can’t give specific safe sunshine advice for children. However, babies should be kept out of direct sunlight.

You can also find vitamin D in margarine, egg yolks, cod liver oil and oily fish such as herrings and sardines. You should be able to get enough vitamin D through diet and by enjoying an active, outdoors lifestyle during the summer months.