

Building Better Bones



Mixed Green Salad with Orange Vinaigrette

As most of us already know, calcium consumption is essential for strong, healthy bones. But did you know that we have more calcium in our bodies than any other mineral and about 99 percent of it is found in our bones?

If you do not take in enough of this precious mineral, your body will draw calcium from your bones. If this happens with regularity, or if you did not get enough calcium when your bones were growing, you may develop osteoporosis later in life. Osteoporosis is characterized by weak and fragile bones, and is the major cause of bone fractures in postmenopausal women and the elderly. Subsequently, it is also one of the leading causes of disability in this country.

The best time for building bones is during childhood and the teen years, when bones begin to strengthen and grow. However, peak bone mass continues to build until age 35. Then, bones begin to gradually lose calcium as a natural part of the aging process. This process occurs more quickly in women than men due to a drop in estrogen levels during and after menopause. Estrogen protects bones during the child-bearing years. In all persons, even if a peak bone mass is reached, a poor diet and lack of exercise will decrease calcium stores and increase one's risk for osteoporosis.

1. Consume enough calcium. The best source of calcium is milk and dairy products, but for people who are lactose intolerant, dislike milk, or are vegans (people who do not eat any animal products), they need to get calcium through non-dairy sources. See Recommended Dietary Allowances for calcium.
2. Get enough vitamin D, which aids in the absorption of calcium in the body. The body can make it after being exposed to sunlight for about 15 minutes daily. Food sources include fortified milk, cheese, eggs, sardines, salmon and breakfast cereals. You may also take a multiple vitamin with 400 IU of vitamin D.
3. Consider a calcium supplement. If not meeting daily requirements with diet, a supplement is recommended. Absorption is best when taken in single doses of 500 milligrams or less at a time.
4. Do weight bearing exercises at least three times weekly. This may include walking, jogging, aerobics, dancing or weight lifting. The pull of muscle on bone helps to stimulate new bone growth.

5. Avoid excessive intakes of alcohol, caffeine, sodium, and high protein foods. Also no smoking. All of these can increase calcium loss from the bones. Recommended Dietary Allowances Age Calcium (mg/day) 4 - 8 800 9 - 18 1,300 19 - 50 1,000 > 51 1,200 * > 51 1,500 Recommended Dietary Allowances * postmenopausal women not on estrogen Mixed Green Salad with Orange Vinaigrette by Connie Bradshaw, RD 6 cups loosely packed mixed salad greens (include 1 cup each turnip greens, collard greens and kale) 1 cup mandarin oranges 3/4 cup dried cranberries 1/2 cup soybeans or navy beans, cooked 1/2 cup almonds, sliced 1 Tablespoon balsamic vinegar 1 Tablespoon Dijon mustard 2 Tablespoons fresh lemon juice 2 Tablespoons fresh orange juice 1/2 teaspoon sugar 1/2 teaspoon salt 1/4 cup olive oil 2 teaspoons capers, drained In a large bowl, combine balsamic vinegar, Dijon mustard, juices, sugar, salt and capers. With wire whisk, slowly beat in olive oil until mixture thickens slightly. Add salad greens, mandarin oranges, cranberries, beans and almonds to dressing in bowl. Toss gently to coat. Serves 6