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Osteoporosis: Calcium and exercise to strengthen the bones – do you get enough?

People who are physically active and get enough calcium can strengthen their bones - even in old age / New online calcium calculator

Cologne, 12 September 2008: A stumble, a fall - a broken bone: many older people are afraid of this happening. The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care published information today about how you can protect yourself. Research shows that regular adequate intake of calcium and exercise can strengthen the bones. But many people do not know whether they are getting enough calcium in their diets. The Institute has developed a calculator at www.informedhealthonline.org (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/informed-health-online.2.en>) that can help you estimate if you are getting enough calcium.

Regular intake of calcium protects the bones

Getting older does not necessarily mean that you will get osteoporosis. However, the risk of osteoporosis does rise as we get older, and people over 70 often have brittle bones. A fall does not only mean bruises then, but it is easier for a bone to break. There are several ways to protect and strengthen bones, even when you are already older.

One important way is to get enough calcium regularly. To stop our bones losing too much strength we need an increasing amount of calcium as we get older. The best way to get it is with a calcium-rich diet. "Older people in particular are often not getting enough calcium," according to the Institute's Director, Professor Peter Sawicki.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a minimum daily intake of calcium of 1,300 mg for women after the menopause and men over the age of 65. The Institute developed an online calculator for its website with the help of the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin. The calculator helps you find out quickly and easily roughly how much calcium you are getting through your diet every day and whether that is enough.

If you cannot get enough calcium in your diet, then calcium supplements could help. Trials have shown that taking daily calcium supplements can help protect people who are at high risk of bone fracture. According to Professor Sawicki, "Even when you are already over 70, you can reduce your risk of bone fracture if you get enough calcium."

Exercise strengthens the bones and might help reduce the risk of falling

Some people believe that they can best protect themselves by not moving around too much and trying to avoid situations where they might have a chance of falling. But in reality being too immobile is one of the major risk factors for osteoporosis. If you spend a large part of the day sitting or lying down, your bones are more likely to become weak and brittle. Physical activity that involves carrying your weight can actually strengthen your bones. One of the easier ways to get exercise with a low risk of injury is brisk walking. According to the Institute, even in older age, walking is a simple way of getting enough exercise that people feel comfortable with - and it benefits more than the bones, as well.

Professor Sawicki said: "Injury is of course always possible when you exercise. But people who are more active strengthen their muscles and bones - and that can help them stay physically stable and secure. People may gain more confidence in their bodies and that might mean a lower risk of stumbling and falling."

The Institute's website www.informedhealthonline.org (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/index.en.html>) informs the general public about the latest developments in medical research on important health questions. Anyone who would like to keep up-to-date with the latest information releases on the website can subscribe to its newsletter (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/index.471.69.en.html>)

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Glossary

calcium

Calcium is an important mineral for human health. It is one of the building blocks for bones and teeth, and it is necessary for blood clotting, the muscles and the nerves. Calcium occurs in milk and milk products, as well as in green leafy vegetables. People can get a calcium deficiency if they have a chronic inflammatory bowel disease, as well as in pregnancy or during breastfeeding.

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization is a United Nations agency. Based in Geneva, it is concerned with matters of public health on an international level. Its objective is to obtain the highest possible level of health for all people worldwide. Health is understood here as being a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. To reach this aim the WHO develops guidelines and standards in health-related areas, coordinates activities in the fight against infectious diseases, launches global vaccination programs and analyzes health and disease data worldwide. More information is available at www.who.int.

Sources

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

Evidence basis of our health information

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at **www.informedhealthonline.org**

Disclaimer

This information was prepared and published by the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG). It is based on the evidence and other scientific literature available at the time of publication. The information is intended for the use of patients in Germany. It is not intended to for use to diagnose illnesses and the information is not intended to substitute for medical advice.