

# HEALTHY LIVING FOR STRONG BONES

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# Keeping your bones healthy

## **Your bones change throughout your life.**

It's never too early or too late to start looking after your bones. A healthy, balanced diet and regular exercise can help keep your bones strong at every stage of your life. Keeping your bones strong helps reduce the chance of osteoporosis and broken bones (fractures).

## Healthy eating for your bones

### **Eating a healthy, balanced diet can help you get all the nutrients you need for your bones.**

Try to eat meals that have foods from the four main food groups. These are:

- fruit and vegetables
- carbohydrates, like bread, potatoes, pasta and cereals
- dairy and alternatives, like milk and cheese
- protein, like beans, eggs, fish and meat.

Try to cut down on caffeine, sugary drinks and salt.

For more information about these food groups and how much of each you need, visit [theros.org.uk/nutrition](https://www.theros.org.uk/nutrition)

Calcium and vitamin D are just two nutrients that are important for bone health.

## What is osteoporosis?

### **Osteoporosis is a condition where your bones lose strength, making you more likely to break a bone.**

Anyone can have osteoporosis. It's most common in older people, especially women who have been through the menopause. But men, younger people, children and pregnant women can also have osteoporosis.

There are medicines to help strengthen your bones if you have osteoporosis. A healthy, balanced diet and exercise is also important.

*"I think it's important, especially for younger people to be aware of osteoporosis. We can do things to help strengthen our bones and reduce the chance of osteoporosis, just by making a few small changes to our lives." Ed, 25*

# Calcium

**Calcium gives your bones the strength and hardness they need to cope with everyday activities.**

There are plenty of foods that are rich in calcium, including:

- dairy products, like milk, cheese and yoghurt
- leafy green vegetables, like broccoli and cabbage
- fruit, like oranges and dried figs
- carbohydrates, like pasta and rice
- fish, like sardines and mackerel.

Many dairy-free and meat-free products such as calcium-set tofu and plant-based milk are fortified with calcium. This means calcium has been added to the food. Check the label to find out how much calcium has been added.

You can usually get all the calcium you need for your bones from your food, without taking a supplement.

Visit [theros.org.uk/calcium-chooser](https://theros.org.uk/calcium-chooser) or order your free copy of 'How to look after your bones' to find more calcium-rich foods in our food chooser.

## **How much calcium do I need?**

Calcium is measured in milligrams (mg).

Most adults need **700mg** of calcium a day, including if you're pregnant.

If you have a balanced diet, you're likely to get all the calcium you need. For example, you would get around 700mg of calcium if as part of a balanced diet, you ate:

- two slices of bread
- one small matchbox size piece of cheese
- three tablespoons of green beans
- one orange
- a handful of almonds
- one tablespoon of raisins
- one glass of calcium-fortified soya milk.

There are some health conditions where your doctor may advise you to have less or more calcium.

Talk to your doctor if you're unsure how much calcium you should have.

### **Did you know?**

If you're at risk of broken bones or taking an osteoporosis medicine, your doctor may advise you to increase your intake of calcium. This is to make sure you're getting enough for your bones.

## Vitamin D

**Vitamin D helps your body absorb and use calcium. It also helps to keep your muscles strong.**

You can get vitamin D from sunlight, supplements and food.

The sun's rays react with your skin to make vitamin D. In the UK, your skin can only make vitamin D from sunlight between the beginning of April and the end of September. This may vary depending on where you live.

During this time, you should expose your skin, without sunscreen, to direct sunlight. This should only be for around 10 minutes, once or twice a day. Take care not to burn. You only need to expose the skin on your face and arms.

You can usually get all the vitamin D you need for your bones from sunlight in the summer. But everyone should consider taking a daily supplement from the end of September to the beginning of April. This is because we can't make vitamin D from the sun in the winter.

A vitamin D supplement is recommended all year round if you:

- don't spend much time outside
- cover up most of your skin when you go outside
- use sunscreen most of the time.

It may be helpful to have a vitamin D supplement all year round if you:

- have dark skin
- are pregnant or breast-feeding.

### **How much vitamin D do I need?**

Vitamin D in food and supplements is measured in micrograms ( $\mu\text{g}$ ) or international units (IU).

1 microgram of vitamin D is the same as 40 IU.

Most adults need **10 micrograms** of vitamin D a day.

Some foods contain a small amount of vitamin D. But it's difficult to get enough vitamin D from food alone. Foods containing vitamin D include:

- oily fish, like herring, salmon and mackerel
- eggs
- red meats.

It's important to enjoy these foods in moderation and as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Some foods such as certain breakfast cereals, bread and yoghurt are fortified with vitamin D. This means vitamin D has been added to the food. Check the label to find out how much vitamin D has been added.

#### **Did you know?**

If you're at risk of broken bones or taking an osteoporosis medicine, your doctor may advise you to increase your vitamin D intake to a 20 microgram supplement of vitamin D. This is to make sure you're getting enough for your bones.

Visit [theros.org.uk/vitamin-d](https://theros.org.uk/vitamin-d) or order your free copy of '**How to look after your bones**' for more information.

*"Since being diagnosed with osteoporosis, I make every effort to eat plenty of calcium in my diet and take a vitamin D supplement in the winter months."* **Volunteer, Royal Osteoporosis Society**

## Alcohol and smoking

**Drinking more than the recommended levels of alcohol and smoking can harm your bones. This means they increase your chance of osteoporosis and broken bones.**

It's too early to say whether e-cigarettes ('vapes') are better for your bones than tobacco products.

Men and women should have no more than 14 units of alcohol a week. This should be spread over three or more days.

14 units is the same as:

- 6 pints of average-strength beer, or
- 10 small (125ml) glasses of lower-strength wine, or
- 14 small (25ml) shots of spirits.

There is support available if you're worried you're drinking too much alcohol or want to stop smoking. Speak to your GP for more information.

Visit [theros.org.uk/nutrition](https://theros.org.uk/nutrition) to find out more about healthy habits for your bones.

## Exercise for bones

Exercise can help keep your bones and muscles strong. It can also help your balance so you're less likely to fall over and break a bone.

### Exercise for strong bones

Bones get stronger when you use them. The best way to help your bone strength is to do weight-bearing impact and muscle-strengthening exercise.

Weight-bearing impact exercise involves being on your feet and adding an extra force or controlled jolt through your bones. Dancing, jogging, brisk walking and tennis are examples of this.

Muscle-strengthening exercise involves moving your muscles against resistance to make them stronger. Resistance comes from your own body weight, a resistance band or weight.

#### **Did you know?**

Exercise is unlikely to cause a broken bone. But if you have osteoporosis, you may need to adapt some exercises to be on the safe side – especially if you have spinal fractures or have had many broken bones.

### Exercise for balance and muscle strength

It's important to have good balance and coordination. This is because slips, trips and falls can lead to broken bones. If you're unsteady on your feet, there are some activities you can do to help like dance, yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates.

### How much exercise do I need to do?

It's important to do exercise you enjoy and at a level that's right for you.

The Government has published guidelines on their recommendations for exercise, based on age:

- **adults (under 65)** should do 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity every week. For example, this could be 30 minutes spread over five days. You should also do muscle-strengthening exercise at least two days a week.

- **older adults (over 65)** should do the same amount of moderate-intensity activity as those under 65. You should also exercise to improve your balance at least two days a week and avoid sitting for a long time.

Moderate-intensity activity means getting warm and your heart rate up so you get slightly out of breath.

Visit [theros.org.uk/exercise](https://theros.org.uk/exercise) for more information about how to exercise safely for your bones.

# My healthy bones guide

Use this space to make notes on how to look after your bones.

## Calcium and vitamin D

I will have \_\_\_\_\_ mg of calcium a day.

I'll achieve this by:

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I will have \_\_\_\_\_ micrograms of vitamin D a day.

I'll achieve this by:

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## Personal goals

Weight-bearing impact exercise:

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Muscle-strengthening exercise:

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Alcohol and smoking:

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**Notes**

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## Getting more information and support

### **About our health information**

Our health information is written by our health information team and is reviewed by healthcare professionals and people living with osteoporosis. We make every reasonable effort to ensure the content is accurate and up-to-date.

Our information is not a substitute for medical advice provided by your own doctor or other healthcare professional.

For more information about healthy living and osteoporosis visit [theros.org.uk/healthinfo](https://theros.org.uk/healthinfo)

To order your free copy of our booklets, including 'How to look after your bones' call **01761 471771** or email [info@theros.org.uk](mailto:info@theros.org.uk)

### **Support for you**

Our specialist Helpline nurses are here to answer your questions or concerns about bone health or living with osteoporosis. You can visit [theros.org.uk/helpline](https://theros.org.uk/helpline) or call **0300 102 3030**

Join the Royal Osteoporosis Society and we'll always be in your corner. Whether you need information to make sense of your diagnosis, or guidance on ways to live well with osteoporosis, we're here for you. Join today at [theros.org.uk/join-us](https://theros.org.uk/join-us) or call **01761 473287**

We have a network of support groups across the UK, which are run by volunteers. Find a support group and view the online programme at [theros.org.uk/groups](https://theros.org.uk/groups)

The Bone Health and Osteoporosis UK online community is a welcoming and safe space for you to share your experiences with others. Whether you're living with osteoporosis or supporting someone, our community is here for you. Visit [theros.org.uk/online-forum](https://theros.org.uk/online-forum)

*"The Helpline nurses were so helpful. They pointed me in the right direction and it's so reassuring to know they're there if I ever need support in the future." Annette, 65*

## About the Royal Osteoporosis Society

We're the Royal Osteoporosis Society – the UK's largest national charity dedicated to improving bone health and beating osteoporosis. And we're here for everyone. We equip people with practical information and support to take action on their bone health.

### **How you can help**

As an independent charity, we don't receive any government funding. So we can only continue to provide our services through the generosity of our supporters.

We would appreciate any donation you're able to give to support our work. If you'd like to donate, visit [theros.org.uk/donations](https://theros.org.uk/donations) or call **01761 473287**

Your donation will help us support more people with osteoporosis.

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**Next review:** July 2027