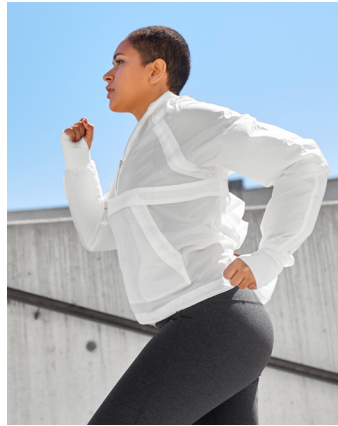


Protect your bones

Bones feel solid, but the inside of a bone is actually filled with holes like a honeycomb. Bone tissues are broken down and rebuilt all the time. While some cells build new bone tissue, others dissolve bone and release the minerals inside.



As we get older, we begin to lose more bone than we build. The tiny holes within bones get bigger, and the solid outer layer becomes thinner. In other words, our bones get less dense. Hard bones turn spongy, and spongy bones turn spongier. If this loss of bone density goes too far, it's called osteoporosis. Over 10 million people nationwide are estimated to have osteoporosis.

Even if you already have osteoporosis, it's not too late to start taking care of your bones. Along with medicines to prevent more bone loss or build new bone mass, your doctor may also recommend getting more calcium, vitamin D, and physical activity.

In bad accidents, it's normal for bones to break. But if your bones are dense enough, they should be able to withstand most falls. Bones weakened by osteoporosis, though, are more likely to break.



LOWER RISK OF OSTEOPOROSIS

Getting plenty of calcium, vitamin D, and exercise is a good start.

- **Calcium** is a mineral that helps bones stay strong. It can come from the foods you eat—including milk and milk products, fortified plant milk, dark green leafy vegetables like kale and collard greens—or from dietary supplements.
- **Vitamin D** helps your body absorb calcium. As you grow older, your body needs more vitamin D, which is made by your skin when you're in the sun. You can also get vitamin D from dietary supplements and from certain foods, such as milk, egg yolks, saltwater fish, fortified milks and cereals, and cod liver oil.

- **Exercise**, especially weight-bearing exercise, helps bones too. Weight-bearing exercises include jogging, walking, pickleball, and dancing. The pull of muscles helps maintain dense bones. Resistance exercises that use an opposing force, such as weights, an elastic band, or water, also help.

Smoking, in contrast, weakens bones. Heavy drinking does too—and makes people more likely to fall. Certain drugs may also increase the risk of osteoporosis. Having family members with osteoporosis can raise your risk for the condition as well.