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Good Bone Health

Making a few changes to your lifestyle can lower your risk of developing osteoporosis say staff at the Royal United Hospital.

They advise that eating a balanced diet and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, which includes plenty of weight bearing exercise, can prolong good bone health.

Osteoporosis is a condition that causes bones to become thin and porous. Bone loss is silent and often painless and can occur without sign or symptom for many years. The first noticeable sign of osteoporosis is often a painful osteoporotic fracture, commonly referred to as a fragility fracture.

Sue Gage, Orthopaedic Trauma Nurse at the Royal United Hospital, says: "Patients are usually unaware that they have fragile bones until the time of a first fracture. Standard x-rays will only show the disease when about one third of the bone mass has already gone.

"A dual energy x-ray (DEXA), a simple non-invasive scan which measures bone density, is used to detect reduced bone density (osteoporosis) in its early stages. Once diagnosed, treatment for osteoporosis can begin which helps prevent further fractures by strengthening bones.

"Having osteoporosis does not automatically mean that your bones will break; it means that you have a 'greater risk of fracture'. Thin fragile bones are not painful but the broken bones that can result may cause pain and lead to other problems. However, effective drug treatments, physiotherapy and practical support can reduce the risk of further fractures and speed recovery."

Staff will continue to raise awareness of the importance of good bone health during National Osteoporosis Day on 20 October 2012.

Osteoporosis can occur at any age, although it is more common in older individuals. Almost one in two women and one in five men over the age of 50 will break a bone, mainly due to osteoporosis. Women are especially at risk. At menopause, when oestrogen levels fall dramatically, bone loss happens more quickly. Other factors can cause bone loss as well. Smoking, drinking excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol, taking certain medications and medical conditions like Crohn's or coeliac disease can all increase risk.

Sue says: "Our genes are key to deciding the potential size and strength of our skeleton, but the way we live our life can also play a part in the amount of bone we invest in our 'bone bank' during our youth, and how much we retain in later life.



“Young women and young men attain their peak bone mass at the ages of 16 and 20, respectively. A diet rich in calcium and adequate vitamin D is essential, and though it’s never too late to eat right for your bone health, it’s crucial to maintain a bone-healthy diet in our early years to prepare ourselves for the bone deterioration that occurs later in life.”

Regular exercise, at any age, particularly weight bearing exercise, such as walking and dancing are very important in maintaining good bone health.

Osteoporosis causes bones to break following a minor bump or fall. These broken bones are most common in the wrist, hip and spine, although other parts of the body can also be affected.

The RUH, in partnership with the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases, provides a falls and fracture liaison service for patients who attend clinics following a fracture, or the Emergency Department with a fall.

More useful information can be found on the National Osteoporosis Society website www.nos.org.uk

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