Kick Back at Osteoporosis!

BY DEB BROWN, NSCA-CPT, CWC, CNS

Osteoporosis is the thinning of bones, with reduction in bone mass, caused by the depletion of calcium and bone protein. The condition can predispose a person to bone fractures, which are then slow to heal. Although men can develop osteoporosis, it is most commonly found in postmenopausal women. As we age, we all lose bone mass starting at about age 30: existing bone cells are reabsorbed by the body faster than we can make them. Because women have a lower peak bone mass around age 30, we are affected more than men are. Women also lose bone mass due to hormonal changes around menopause. According to recent data from the Centers for Disease Control, "16 percent of women and 4 percent of men ages 50 and older have osteoporosis." So, how do we prevent getting it or slow down the progress if we DO have it? One important way is to participate in strength training.

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Recommendations made by the National Osteoporosis Foundation include getting enough calcium and Vitamin D, possible supplementation and "regular weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening exercise to improve agility, strength, posture, and balance; maintain or improve bone strength; and reduce the risk of falls and fractures." So how does strength training affect osteoporosis? As you lift a load (such as a dumbbell), the muscle applies pressure to the bone. The bone responds by progressively getting stronger and denser. Most of the research I have looked at states that it typically can take 6–9 months of progressive and consistent work to start seeing a difference in bone density. Often, the first sign is a slowing down of the rate of loss of bone. Not only does consistent strength training have a positive effect on bone density, but it also increases muscle strength, coordination, and balance. All of these attributes are helpful to the avoidance of falls.

We have several clients who are successfully working with us to slow down and in some cases reverse the effects of osteoporosis. When they first came in, we started with four weeks of a foundational fitness program to get the bones and joints used to consistent weight-bearing exercise. As we continue to work with these clients, we progressively increase the load and reduce the repetitions, always in a safe manner. This overload is what causes both muscle and bone to get stronger. We focus on major muscle groups like the legs, hips and core, but also address upper body strength.

If you have been diagnosed with osteopenia or osteoporosis, one of the things within your control is to increase your load-bearing exercise. Consult your doctor about the risks of osteoporosis and chat with him/her about the feasibility of starting a supervised strength training program. **This article is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any medical condition.** Feel free to contact us for information about how we can design a customized program for you. **We can be reached at 303-816-1426 or www.onthemovefitness.com.**

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