

Six reasons not to be a lazybones

By Osteoporosis Canada

Regular physical activity improves health in so many ways. Physically active people have a lower risk of developing most chronic diseases. They sleep better and have better emotional health; they have greater energy and stamina; they have more self-confidence and are more productive.

The importance of physical activity for people with osteoporosis cannot be overstated. When a muscle is used repetitively and consistently, as in exercise, a change can be seen over time. The same effect is not visible with bone tissue, however, this does not mean there is no similar effect. Studies show that people who have been bed-ridden for a lengthy period of time and astronauts who have been in weightless environments both suffer from a significant loss of bone density. On the other hand, studies of tennis players show an increase in bone density in the playing arm.

Building a strong skeleton during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood is like a retirement plan for your bones: it may help you to avoid osteoporosis later in life. Regular weight-bearing exercise such as walking or aerobics and strength or resistance training are all essential for building strong muscles and bones.

Weight-bearing exercise

This is exercise that allows bones and muscles to work against the force of gravity. Examples of weight bearing exercises are: walking, jogging, aerobics, dancing, stair climbing and racquet sports.

Resistance exercise

This type of exercise uses muscular strength to improve muscle mass and strengthen bone. The use of a “load,” like free weights, weight machines and exercise bands, puts stress on the muscle group that is being worked. This type of training has a bone building effect and trabecular bone (the spongy, inner core) responds best to this type of exercise. Bones in the spine and hip are mainly trabecular bone.

The six reasons for people with osteoporosis to be physically active are:

Improve posture

Postural training is a key goal for people with osteoporosis. Back extension exercises, abdominal, arm and shoulder exercises all contribute to posture awareness.

Decrease the risk of falling

In older people, 5% to 10% of falls result in fractures and 25% of falls result in other significant injuries. Exercise helps to decrease falls, as well as the risk of falls if the exercise includes activities aimed at improving balance. Balance exercises increase the ability to handle quick or unbalanced movement in daily life.

Improve muscular strength

Exercise for osteoporosis focuses on strengthening the large muscles in the upper and lower body as well as the torso. These muscles are used in everyday activities; therefore, strengthening these muscles will help to ensure independent living and an overall positive quality of life.

Improve flexibility

As we age, we lose flexibility from inactivity and poor habits and the imbalance associated with lost flexibility contributes to pain and restricted movement. Stretching exercises will help to regain lost flexibility and contribute to enjoying exercise.

Increase endurance and stamina

People with osteoporosis should use caution when performing high-impact exercise because it may contribute to fracture. Low-impact aerobic exercise is exercise that safely and comfortably increases breathing and heart rate for an extended period of time, without making it difficult to breathe in and out. Individuals are advised to consult a physiotherapist before starting an aerobic exercise program.

Walking may help build bones and provides many benefits to overall fitness. To be effective, it has to be brisk, done regularly (4-7 days per week) for at least 10 minutes at a time for a total of 30-60 minutes a day.

Improve overall quality of life

A four-year study of women with osteoporosis showed that pain decreased yearly in the whole group, but decreased significantly in those with the greatest improvement in aerobic fitness. Another study used an Osteoporosis Functional Disability Questionnaire to assess pain and activities of daily living. Those who chose to participate in exercise showed a significant decrease in pain that interferes with daily activity and a subsequent improvement in their quality of life.

Exercise Precautions

Individuals with osteoporosis should be encouraged to consult a physiotherapist to learn how to perform everyday activities safely. In general, be careful when performing activities that require reaching overhead, twisting, bouncing or jerky movements. Avoid side or forward bending of the spine from any position (standing, sitting or lying).

Points to Remember

- Check with your physician before starting an osteoporosis exercise program
- Don't do exercise that causes pain • Stretch before and after exercise
- Choose a facility, leader or trainer who knows the exercise restrictions associated with osteoporosis
- Choose an activity or program that is enjoyable.

For more information on how you can fight osteoporosis please visit Osteoporosis Canada's website at www.osteoporosis.ca.

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