

What is the best exercise for Healthy Bones?

By James Bone

The best exercise to keep your bones strong is WEIGHT BEARING and impact exercises, such as fast walking, walking up and down hills, gardening, running, jumping, dancing, bouncing, and other exercise which places a load on your bones. Non-weight bearing exercise, such as swimming or cycling, does not have as much effect on your bones.

BEST TIP - Aim to do at least 30 - 60 minutes of weight bearing exercise at least 3 times per week.

Research has shown that exercises to strengthen your back, particularly back extension exercises, when you are middle aged, can help dramatically reduce your risk of getting a spinal fracture when you are older. Research has also shown that doing shoulder press strength exercises in standing positions, can help increase the strength of the hip bone.

The BEST proven exercise to increase bone strength is *STRENGTH TRAINING*, using some form of resistance, such as weights, bands, or machine based resistance. Additionally, Strength exercises using functional exercises with free weights, has been shown to be better at reducing falls and improving function, than exercises using only machines.

BEST TIP - Aim to do strength exercise 2 to 3 times per week, with a day of rest between. Do at least one set of 8 to 10 exercises, targeting all your major muscle groups, including back strengthening and extension exercises.

What cares do you need to take?

If you have Osteoporosis, then you should maintain your spine in NEUTRAL during exercise, and AVOID flexing, excessively twisting your spine, lifting anything too heavy or high impact exercise.

If you have had an Osteoporotic fracture, then exercise can still be helpful, but you should get a specific tailored program from a physiotherapist or qualified health care provider, to suit your needs.

If you are NOT a regular exerciser, and you have a medical problem, or a risk factor which may be upset by exercise, then you should get a medical clearance, before beginning a new exercise program.

ALWAYS follow the rule of moderation – while some exercise is good, excessive amounts of exercise, or trying to progress too quickly, can lead to injury.

Can Yoga Help?

Proverbs 15:30:

"A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones."

There is no specific research related to yoga & bone health. However, from what we know about exercise, we can make some observations. Yoga teaches correct posture,

yogic core strength (the bandhas/locks) and natural body movement. It contains a number of practices, which focus on back extension strength. Yoga incorporates many postures which place weight bearing forces through the upper limbs and spine, in ways which one does not usually do daily. This includes practices such as Plank, Downward Facing Dog, Upward Facing Dog, Dolphin, Handstand, to name a few. Yoga also incorporates many standing postures, which can enhance balance, and so may help reduce falls risk as we become older.

At a deeper level, yoga practice has been shown to have various effects on the nervous and hormonal systems. Yoga has been shown to induce the relaxation response, the reversal of stress. A yoga class of just 30 minutes has been shown to reduce the stress hormone cortisol. Research indicates that chronic levels of cortisol due to stress, can contribute to bone loss. In a recent Canada-wide bone-health study, Dr. Jerilynn Prior and colleagues asked novel questions about happiness and worry and their relationship to bone health. To the surprise of some, they found that the negative feelings of unhappiness and worry were more highly associated with bone fractures than factors like low-calcium intake, lack of exercise, and smoking. Regular yoga may help better manage stress, and so in this way aid bone health. Another little know area is whether yoga has an effect on other hormones, such as estrogen (the bone hormone in women), and whether this can be influenced by yoga practice.

It has been shown that smoking, excessive caffeine, and alcohol all can affect bone health. The true practice of Yoga is connected with healthier lifestyle practices.

So if you are not currently doing some bone friendly exercise, then today could be a good time to start. If you are... then keep up the good work