Physiotherapists:
The Body Specialists

Physio Tips

OSTEOPOROSIS

Physiotherapy Association of BC

Make no bones about it – osteoporosis prevention must start at an early age

Physiotherapists advise that skipping, dancing and other fun strength and balance activities can help battle the onset of osteoporosis, the "paediatric disease with geriatric consequences", as Osteoporosis Canada so aptly describes it.

Osteoporosis currently affects 1.4 million Canadians. This disease is characterized by low bone mass and deterioration of bone tissue causing bones to become more fragile and resulting in a higher risk of fractures. As the incidence of osteoporosis grows, it is anticipated that the next 35 years will see a threefold increase in the number of hip fractures alone, not to mention an increase in other fractures such as the spine and wrist, also common in people with osteoporosis.

Increasing age, sedentary lifestyle and poor nutrition are important risk factors for osteoporosis. Research shows that those who focus on their bone health when they are young can significantly decrease their risk of osteoporosis later in life. A crucial element in preventing osteoporosis in later years is to adopt good exercise habits early on that include plenty of weight bearing activities to increase bone strength. Meena Sran, PhD, (and past PABC President) a physiotherapist and osteoporosis researcher says simple activities like skipping, running, jumping, and dancing are good examples of 'fun' bone building activities. "These activities can help both kids and adults build and maintain their bone density throughout life".

Weight training is another activity that can help people improve their bone density. "Weight training is particularly important the older we get," says Dr. Sran. "Most fractures from osteoporosis occur as the result of a fall, so it is important to work on maintaining and improving our strength and balance. "If you have special concerns such as back pain or knee pain, it's best to get an assessment from a physiotherapist who can develop a personalized exercise program tailored to your health needs".

There's also good news if you have been diagnosed with osteoporosis and need help protecting yourself against injury. Many communities in Canada offer specialized programs for people with osteoporosis. One example is Osteofit, developed by the BC Women's Health Centre's Osteoporosis Program. This program of education, lifestyle management and exercise is designed to improve physical function, increase quality of life, and reduce the risk of falls and fractures in people living with osteoporosis.

Weight bearing and strength training exercises have an important role to play in osteoporosis prevention and management, by increasing bone mass at a young age and maintaining bone density and preventing falls in later years. Physiotherapists, with their comprehensive knowledge of how the body moves, are playing an integral role in the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis. Whether you want a life long exercise plan to prevent osteoporosis, or already have the disease and need advice on maintaining function and reducing your risk of falls, consult a physiotherapist who can help you achieve your bone health goals.

Physiotherapists are experts in movement and mobility, body mechanics, muscles and joints. They will help develop an exercise program specially-tailored to your needs, putting together the right combination of activities to improve physical fitness and avoid injury.

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