

# Star Special

THE STAR, FRIDAY 20 OCTOBER 2023

WORLD OSTEOPOROSIS DAY

SOME of the common signs of inflammation include body pain, constant fatigue, insomnia, anxiety, gastrointestinal complications, weight gain and frequent infections.

Inflammation is an essential part of the body's immune response to injuries and infective foreign substances, such as bacteria and viruses. Acute inflammation occurs as part of the body's natural healing process. The symptoms subside once the body has healed.

On the flip side, chronic inflammation, can spread throughout the body and wreak havoc, leading to many serious health



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## Dealing with inflammation

conditions. It is believed to be the root of a myriad of health conditions, from allergies, depression, autism, asthma, arthritis, and eczema, to some life-threatening diseases such as diabetes, heart attack, stroke and even cancer.

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## Losing bone density

INDIVIDUALS are often unaware they have osteoporosis until they experience a bone fracture. While a definitive diagnosis typically requires bone density testing, several risk factors and warning signs can indicate a higher likelihood of developing osteoporosis. Here are some things to look out for:

### Age and gender

Age is one of the most significant risk factors for osteoporosis. It is more common in adults, above the age of 50, particularly women after menopause. Women are known to have fewer bone tissues and tend to lose more tissue compared to men due to the changes during menopause. Keep in mind that while age is a factor, osteoporosis can affect people of all ages.

### Family history

A family history of osteoporosis can increase an individual's risk. If your parents or siblings have been diagnosed with osteoporosis or

experienced fractures due to weak bones, it's essential to be vigilant.

### Sedentary lifestyle

A lack of physical activity and a sedentary lifestyle can contribute to the development of osteoporosis. Regular weight-bearing exercises and strength training can help maintain bone density and strength.

### Alcohol consumption

Excessive alcohol consumption, those who consume more than two drinks a day on most days have a higher risk of developing osteoporosis. Consuming too much alcohol can cause an imbalance of calcium in the body which is needed for bone growth.

Excessive drinking can also affect hormones in both men and women. For women, irregular menses can occur and this leads to lower production of oestrogen which then leads to weakened

> TURN TO PAGE 2

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Care for Life

# Preventing bone deterioration

OUR bones play a vital role in providing structure and shape, protecting organs, anchoring muscles, bodily movements and storing calcium. To keep our bones healthy, it is important to optimise bone development during childhood to build strong bodies and avoid the dreadful consequences of bone fragility disease later in life.

For optimum bone health, proper nutrition is essential, with calcium being the primary component. The average adult requires 1,000mg of calcium per day. Regular consumption of plain dairy products or those fortified with calcium or vitamin D may increase total body bone mineral content. Fermented milk products such as yoghurt and soft cheese are also important sources of calcium, phosphorus and protein.

According to Damansara Specialist Hospital 2 orthopaedic surgeon Dr Shamsul Iskandar Hussein, peak bone mass is achieved by the end of the second decade of

Maintaining good bone health at all stages of life is crucial, as osteoporosis develops gradually over time.

our lives.

“While all the first 20 years of life are important in bone development, approximately 40% to 60% of adult bone mass is achieved during adolescence. 25% of peak bone mass is acquired during the two years around peak height velocity; 12.5 years of age for girls and 14 years of age for boys.

“Nearly all (90%) peak bone mass will have accrued by the age of 18 years.

To keep our bone healthy, optimising bone development during childhood is critical to building strong bodies and avoiding the dreadful consequences of osteoporosis later in life.”

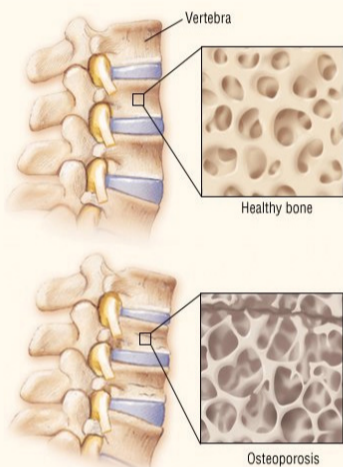
## Lifestyle habits that affect bone health

Many unhealthy lifestyle habits such as smoking tobacco, excessive alcohol consumption and caffeine intake can negatively impact bone health Dr Shamsul mentions.

“Smoking tobacco causes an imbalance in the mechanisms of bone turnover, leading to lower bone mass and mineral density, which ultimately make the bones more vulnerable to osteoporosis.

“Increased alcohol consumption is also associated with a higher risk of osteoporotic hip fractures. An increased intake of caffeine can also lead to a higher risk of osteoporosis. This is because caffeine promotes increased calcium excretion from the bones.”

Besides the lifestyle habits above, Dr Shamsul notes that chronic stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can also lead to weakened bones as a result of hormonal imbalance. He also mentions that psychological stress may also indirectly increase the risk of osteoporosis.



Dr Shamsul Iskandar Hussein.

## Staying fit to maintain bone density and strength

Dr Shamsul explains that physical activity, particularly impact loading of the skeleton, is critical for bone development. Loading the skeleton by walking, running or jumping provides the stimulus for calcium deposition in bone.

“It is noted that weight-bearing endurance activities such as tennis and jogging three to five times per week and resistance training two to three times per week preserves good bone health.”

However, excessive exercise with poor calcium and vitamin D intake can have a negative impact on bone health.

## Strategies and precautions to prevent fractures

Dr Shamsul elaborates on the importance of combined exercise and group exercise

programmes such as weight-bearing activities, balance training, jogging, low-impact loading, high magnitude exercise, muscle strength and simulated functional tasks, are ideal physical activities to increase or preserve bone health.

However, the combination of exercises should be tailored to the patient's clinical features. There is no set protocol in terms of duration, frequency and the type of exercises to be combined.

Physical activity for older adults should be aimed at improving muscle strength, such as resistance training and balance exercises. This is because falling is a significant contributor to fracture risk said Dr Shamsul.

Osteoporotic fracture occurs most frequently at the hip and spine. Hence, physical activity allows for targeted strengthening of the hip and spine since adequate skeletal loading stimulates net bone formation at the stressed skeletal sites.

Aerobic training such as brisk walking, interspersed with jogging, climbing scales and stepping can limit the reduction of bone mineral density. The maximal benefits of physical activity on bone health also depend on adequate nutrient intake; calcium and vitamin D intake while maintaining normal hormonal status.

Good nutrition, exercising and a stress-free life are some of the ways to maintain healthy bones. Therefore, making these lifestyle choices a consistent part of your daily routine can help you build and maintain strong, resilient bones, reducing the risk of bone-related issues and promoting overall well-being. Regularly seeking professional medical advice is also essential in maintaining overall bone health.

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## Under pressure

> FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

bones. For men, it can hinder the production of testosterone – a vital hormone associated with the production of cells important for bone growth.

### Smoking

Smoking can also affect hormone levels which can throw off the balance of oestrogen, the hormone essential for bone strength in both men and women.

Besides that, smoking decreases the supply of blood and oxygen to the bones.

### Low body weight

People with a low body weight or a history of being underweight are at a higher risk of osteoporosis. Low body weight can be an indicator of poor nutrition, which can affect bone health.

### Poor nutrition

A diet deficient in essential nutrients like calcium and vitamin D can weaken bones. Pay attention to whether you are getting enough of these nutrients through your diet or supplements.

### Previous fractures

Having experienced a fracture with minimal or no trauma in the past can be a strong indicator of osteoporosis. This is known as a fragility fracture and should prompt further investigation.

### Hormonal changes

Hormonal changes, such as early menopause or low testosterone levels in men, can increase the risk of osteoporosis.

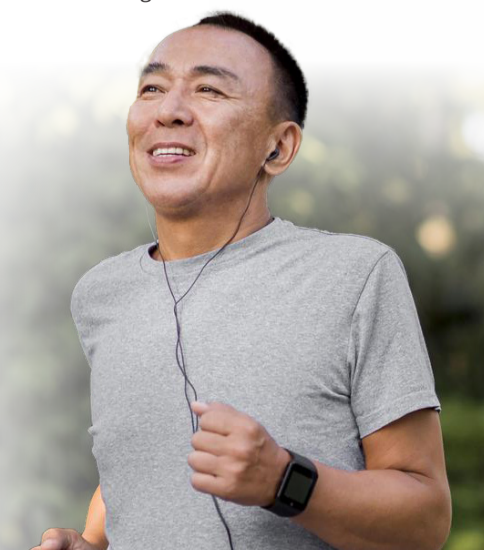
### Height loss

A noticeable decrease in height can be a sign of vertebral compression fractures which are often associated with osteoporosis. If someone is experiencing height loss, it's essential to investigate the cause.

### Unexplained back pain

Persistent back pain, particularly in the upper or lower back, can be a symptom of vertebral fractures related to osteoporosis. If someone is experiencing unexplained back pain, it's advisable to seek medical evaluation.

While osteoporosis can be a challenging condition, it's important to remember that knowledge is your greatest ally. By being aware of the risk factors and warning signs, you've already taken a significant step towards safeguarding your bone health. Reach out to a doctor for guidance and start building a stronger base for a more active and fulfilling life.



# Maintaining a healthy lifestyle

EVERYONE wants to be able to enjoy a fulfilling, long and healthy life that is full of strength and energy. It is essential to strive for good health and make healthier decisions that have a positive impact on your life.

Several health problems are preventable and can be kept at bay by maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Good nutrition, exercise and proper stress management are among the healthy practices that can help to address numerous health issues.

Osteoporosis is defined as a systemic skeletal disease characterised by low bone mass and micro-architectural deterioration of bone tissue, with a consequent increase in bone fragility and susceptibility to fracture. It is a condition where the bone becomes weak, soft, and brittle; which may lead to fracture even after a minor fall or mild trauma. Usually occurring in postmenopausal women, osteoporotic fracture commonly affects the bones around the hips, the wrists and the spine.

Osteoporosis can be classified as primary or secondary. Examples of primary osteoporosis are postmenopausal osteoporosis, age-related osteoporosis, and idiopathic. Secondary osteoporosis owes its name to secondary causes such as endocrine diseases, drugs, and other chronic diseases.

Symptoms of osteoporosis include chronic back pain, loss of

height over time, a stooped posture and pathological fracture that occur in the absence of significant trauma. Causes of osteoporosis can be either modifiable or non-modifiable, with the latter including advancing age, ethnicity, gender, premature menopause, build and family history of osteoporosis.

Modifiable causes include altered oestrogen and thyroid hormone levels, low calcium intake, eating disorders, gastrointestinal surgery, steroids, medical conditions and lifestyle choices.

Most patients with osteoporosis have no symptoms. Patients with osteoporotic spine fractures, however, may present back pain, are hunched forward in their posture or have lost their height.

Osteoporosis diagnosis can be made through conventional radiography and by measuring the bone mineral density (BMD). Blood tests can be done to look for potentially modifiable underlying causes. When a patient presents a trivial trauma fracture, osteoporosis is a presumptive diagnosis; in which BMD measurement with Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) is advised. In the absence of fracture, the gold standard for diagnosis remains the measurement of BMD through DEXA.

According to consultant orthopaedic surgeon Dr Ruzaimi Md Yusoff at MSU Medical Centre,

osteoporosis management starts with lifestyle modifications. Good nutrition and regular exercise are important for prevention.

“Being underweight increases the chance of bone loss and fractures but overweightness increases the risk of fractures in the arms and the wrists. Therefore, maintaining the ideal body weight is important to prevent complications,” he says.

Adequate calcium intake is also important. The average individual needs around 1,000 – 1,300mg of calcium a day. Good sources of calcium include low-fat dairy products, dark-green leafy vegetables, canned salmon or sardines with bones, soy products, calcium-fortified cereals, and orange juice. Calcium supplements should be considered by those with low calcium intake in their daily diet. In addition, calcium absorption is aided by vitamin D, and exposure to sunlight can be a good source. Active individuals exposed to enough sunlight (more than 15 minutes a day) should have adequate vitamin D levels. Elderlies who are institutionalised or immobile, or lack outdoor activities and have a poor dietary intake, will benefit from a daily supplementation of 800 IU vitamin D.

Exercise will help build strong bones and slow down bone loss. Recommended exercises to prevent osteoporosis include combined strength training with



Dr Ruzaimi Md Yusoff.

weight-bearing and balancing. Strength training helps to strengthen muscles and bones in the arms and upper spine. Weight-bearing exercises such as walking, jogging, running, staircase climbing, rope skipping, skiing and impact-producing sports will benefit bones in the legs, the hips and the lower spine. Balancing exercises such as tai chi reduces fall risks, especially in the elderly.

Most osteoporosis-related fractures result from falls. Many factors lead to a fall – poor balance, reduced muscle strength, poor vision, diseases of the nervous or the musculoskeletal systems, excessive alcohol consumption; medications such as sedatives and anti-hypertensive; and home hazards such as steps, inadequate lighting

“Symptoms of osteoporosis include chronic back pain, loss of height over time, a stooped posture and pathological fracture that occur in the absence of significant trauma.”

and slippery floors. All the risk factors for falls should be addressed and treated accordingly to prevent fractures.

Medications such as from the bisphosphonates group are often used to reduce the fracture risk in osteoporotic bone. Evidence shows the fracture risk reduction to be between 25% and 70% depending on the bone involved. Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), Selective Oestrogen Receptor Modulators (SERMs) and Calcitonin injection or nasal spray have been found to be effective in preventing and treating postmenopausal osteoporosis and thus reducing fracture risks.



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Care for Life

MANY Malaysians are often caught off guard when diagnosed with osteoporosis, as it is a condition with no visible symptoms. Significant bone loss can lead to a notable decline in quality of life and has the potential to endanger our lives such as increased risk of bone fractures, and spine and hip breaks.

Osteoporosis has been linked to fractures of the hip, wrist or vertebra (bones of the spine) in about 50% of women over the age of 50, with many older adults experiencing bent bones and spine as a result of poor bone health.

Dr Simmrat Singh, orthopaedic surgeon at Damansara Specialist Hospital 2 emphasises that misconceptions surrounding osteoporosis have left Malaysians relatively unprotected against the detrimental effects of osteoporosis.

While it is known that dairy products are a good source of vitamin D and calcium, Dr Simmrat explains that people

# Stay active for strong bones

lack a comprehensive understanding of the nutritional sources needed to maintain healthy bones.

“Calcium is certainly the most important mineral when it comes to essential minerals for healthy bones. However, there are other minerals such as boron, magnesium, copper and iron, as well as adequate vitamins D and K2 that factor for healthy bones. A balanced diet that is low in sugars and fat is key to reducing the risk of osteoporosis.”

Another overlooked source of vitamin D is exposure to sunlight. There are two prevailing misconceptions among Malaysians – that darker skinned people have healthier vitamin D levels from sunlight exposure and Malaysians receive sufficient amounts of sunlight daily as the country is sunny all year. In truth, many Malaysians spend a majority of their

time indoors, and darker skinned individuals are more susceptible to vitamin D deficiency.

Other than dietary habits, harmful lifestyle factors such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption

Staying active and regularly performing resistance training can help strengthen bone density in the long term.

and even psychological stress can also contribute to developing osteoporosis. Dr Simmrat elaborates on how each of these factors can be highly detrimental to one’s bone health.

“Smoking is number one on the list of bad habits for bone health. It increases the risk of osteoporosis as well as prevents fractures from healing. Chronic alcohol consumption is similarly harmful in that it reduces the body’s absorption of calcium and vitamin D which are critical for healthy bone development.

“Another commonly missed factor is the effect of psychological stress on bone health. Chronic stress causes a spike in a stress hormone called cortisol that can block osteoblasts, which are our bone-building cells. A common example is patients with chronic illnesses, which causes stress on the body and increases their risk of osteoporosis.”

## Combatting bone loss

Bone loss will occur naturally as a person ages, but an active and healthy lifestyle can keep bone deterioration at bay. It is recommended that adults are diligent in maintaining good bone health to enjoy a satisfactory quality of life and mobility later in life. Dr Simmrat highlights various dietary adjustments that are essential for maintaining healthy bones.



Dr Simmrat Singh.

are frequently used and strengthens them accordingly. Through weight and strength exercises, a person can prevent or slow down bone loss, maintain muscle mass to preserve surrounding bone tissue and decrease the risk of falling.”

Eating well and exercising create the most effective results when done in conjunction with one another. For example, maintaining a high-protein diet helps with preserving and gaining muscle mass, which is recommended for older patients to maintain healthy bones.

Dr Simmrat also warns that while physical activity is effective for maintaining bone health, it is important to gradually ease into a new exercise routine, especially for first-timers. By gradually increasing the intensity of a chosen exercise, the body can adapt to the workout and reduce the risk of injury.

While osteoporosis has the potential to negatively affect people’s livelihoods, Dr Simmrat states that a majority of risk factors can be mitigated through proper nutrition and avoiding harmful habits. The sooner a person begins incorporating good habits for preventing bone loss, the better their chances of enjoying a fulfilling life for years to come.

■ For more information, contact 03-7717 3000.



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