

# Salt and Osteoporosis



## What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a condition that causes thinning of bones, making them more prone to breakage.

## What causes osteoporosis?

A lack of dietary calcium can increase the risk of osteoporosis in men, women and children. Postmenopausal women are most at risk of osteoporosis due to the drop in oestrogen they experience, which normally protects bone density.

Salt is a major factor in controlling the amount of calcium in the urine and lost from the bones. Because calcium is important for bone strength, too much salt can lead to bone weakening and therefore osteoporosis. High blood pressure caused by a high salt diet can also increase the risk of osteoporosis by increasing the rate at which calcium is lost from the bones.

## How common is osteoporosis?

In the UK an estimated 3 million people are suffering from osteoporosis, with 1 in 2 women and 1 in 5 men will break a bone after the age of 50, mainly due to poor bone health.

## Who is at risk of osteoporosis?

Bones naturally become thinner with age, so men and women over the age of 50 are both at increased risk of osteoporosis.

During childhood and adolescence we build up our bone mass and strength. If we do not achieve the maximum strength of our bones by the time we reach our mid to late twenties when bone mass reaches its peak, our risk of developing osteoporosis later in life is increased. It is therefore important to have a low salt diet during childhood and adolescence to maximise bone mass.

## Preventing Osteoporosis

Simple changes to your diet and lifestyle can reduce your risk of getting osteoporosis or, if you already have osteoporosis, slow its progression.

Due to the effect that salt and blood pressure can have on bone strength, keeping your salt intake low is particularly important for preventing osteoporosis.

Reducing your intake of high salt foods, particularly processed foods which contain a lot of hidden salt, can really help you to reduce your risk of high blood pressure. Currently the average salt intake in the UK is 8.1g per day; much higher than the daily recommended maximum limit of 6g!



Your intake of caffeine and fizzy drinks should also be kept to a minimum and your intake of Phytates (found in bran and other grains) should not be excessive as they affect the body's ability to absorb calcium.

Increasing your exposure to the sun will increase your Vitamin D and increasing your intake of dairy products will increase your calcium intake; both of which may be beneficial for bone health.

People with osteoporosis often find that simple exercises can help improve their posture and muscle strength which will in turn help to reduce the risk of having a fall and breaking a bone.

## Top tips

- Most of the salt you eat (75%) is hidden in processed foods. Check labels of products such as bread, cereal, soup, sauces and meat products and choose lower salt options
- Don't add salt when cooking or at the table; foods may taste bland at first it will only take a couple of weeks for you to adjust
- Adults should be active for 30 minutes, five times a week; try getting off the bus or train stop earlier and walking into work
- Have regular blood pressure checks to monitor your progress