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No Myth to Healthy Bones
Nicole Smith, Healthy Bones Australia

Many Australians believe that bone health is something that only concerns them when they reach old age, and that osteoporosis is a disease that only affects women.

This misconception, and lack of knowledge surrounding bone health, has contributed to over 33% of Australians having poor bone health, and is also the reason why Healthy Bones Australia is calling for us all to act now. In the previous edition of Osteoblast, we introduced you to Healthy Bones Australia and our Healthy Bones Australia website - a new public health initiative that is aimed at improving the bone health of all Australians. It uses an online calculator to track the three elements that make up strong bones: calcium, exercise and sunshine. The Healthy Bones Australia program is specifically-designed to promote better bone health in the community.

Let’s Talk Calcium

In the 2007 Australian National Nutrition and Activity Survey, 82-89% of 14-16 year old girls did not meet their dietary requirements for calcium. For boys in the same age group the figure was better at 44%, which overall still was not great, particularly when you consider that the bulk of our peak bone mass is achieved by our mid 20’s. We all need a better understanding of calcium and further education on calcium-smart choices; and tracking your Healthy Bones Score through the Healthy Bones Australia Calculator will assist in making these right choices.

For those who truly do need to be concerned about their energy intake, think low fat dairy options which still contain similar calcium levels. There are many dairy alternatives to consider as well, like soy products, tofu, tinned salmon and sardines, many types of nuts, vegetables and legumes. Look out for calcium-fortified foods on the market today, as adding some of these to your daily meals can also help boost calcium levels.

Exercise and Sunshine Myths

Another myth is that being generally fit means your bones are okay. Many Australians don’t even make the connection between exercise and healthy bones — and if they do, they think that any form of exercise will do. When it comes to bone health, not all forms of exercise are equal.

Activities such as swimming and cycling may be important for your cardio health, but they aren’t great for building bone strength. The reason for this is that bones like to be shocked. They like stress, which sounds odd when we talk about brittle bones and breakages, but it’s weight bearing exercise that maximises your bone strength. Throw some impact training or weights into your work out mix. If you are going to swim or cycle, mix it up with skipping, running or weights to stress your bones — they will love it!
No Myth to Healthy Bones (Cont.)

And don’t forget to get outside. Yes, overexposure to the sun can have very dangerous consequences, but underexposure to the sun is also causing problems for our bone health.

In Sydney there is an average of 236 days per year of sun and some places in WA have 286! That’s 78% of the year! And yet 31% of the Australia population have a vitamin D deficiency. Fear of the sun and our long working hours has resulted in vitamin D deficiency becoming common in Australia. Sun exposure is our primary source of vitamin D and is critical for calcium absorption.

Sitting in an office all day behind a glass window will mean that you’re not getting enough sunshine. You need to get outside – especially during the winter months; not for long of course, but your skin needs the chance to soak up some rays. Going outside for a walk with your sleeves rolled up or having a short lunch or break outdoors is a great way to get some sun and vitamin D. Depending on where you live, you should only need 6-8 minutes in summer and a little longer during winter (25-30 minutes). Once you hit your target – you should definitely cover up and be sun safe.

Staying Focused on What’s Important

The point is that you have to concentrate on all 3 aspects of the Healthy Bones program. You need calcium PLUS weight bearing exercise PLUS sunshine for healthy bones. It might sound a little complex but that’s where the Healthy Bones Calculator comes in, to help you out. The aim is to achieve a Healthy Bones Score of 5 for calcium, 5 for exercise and a sunshine tick.

As Professor Robin Daly so aptly said during the recent ‘Australia needs more bone heads’ debate hosted at the Skeleton gallery of the Australian Museum, “What has astounded me the most is that there shouldn’t be a need for this program. If we all changed a few things in what we do every day, osteoporosis wouldn’t be the issue it is today.”

Protecting Our Foundations

We all want to know that the frameworks of our homes are built from good, strong materials. Most of us maintain our homes, for years to come, to ensure that they don’t fall down around us. Healthy Bones Australia is asking each and everyone one of us to start investing in our bones the same way, so that they remain the remarkable structures that they are, providing us with support, movement, protection, calcium storage and blood cell production. All of us must maintain our bone health throughout our lives. After all, strong active bones leads to a strong active life.

To find out more about Healthy Bones Australia or to start tracking your Healthy Bones Score today, visit www.healthybonesaustralia.org.au
World Osteoporosis Day – embrace better bone health

Worldwide, one in three women over 50 will break a bone due to osteoporosis. Don’t wait until it affects you.

Tell your friends and family about better bone health and help make them stronger too.

Talk · Test · Treat

to your doctor for osteoporosis your condition

World Osteoporosis Day – love your bones

www.osteoporosis.org.au | www.healthybonesaustralia.org.au
New translated osteoporosis fact sheets are now available in Chinese, Italian, Greek, Arabic, and Vietnamese on the Osteoporosis Australia website www.osteoporosis.org.au

The multilingual fact sheets provide information on the 4 key topics for bone health – calcium, vitamin D, exercise and medicine. These resources have been developed as part of Osteoporosis Australia’s ongoing multicultural program and have also been promoted to in-language newspapers and media. We encourage community groups to access these important resources on bone health and share them with family and friends.

Q: Can you please explain the genetic component of osteoporosis?
A: Genetic factors are very important in osteoporosis. A single gene has not yet been identified for family history of osteoporosis, however if either of your parents has had a hip fracture or your siblings have osteoporosis or low bone density, then you are likely to be at a higher risk of developing osteoporosis. Family history is an important risk factor for osteoporosis, like many others, including the presence of a prior fragility fracture or increased age. However, even though having a family history may increase the likelihood of having osteoporosis, the risk to the individual of having a fracture in the next 5 or 10 years will also depend on other factors such as age and bone density. Therefore if you have a family history of osteoporosis and you are aged over 50 years, you may want to mention this to your doctor and get a referral for a bone density scan.

Q&A: Ask the Expert

Q: I am a bit confused about the difference between osteoporosis and osteopenia. They sound similar, can you please explain it?
A: This is a good question. To start, ‘osteo’ simply means bone. Osteopenia and osteoporosis refer to different ranges of bone mineral density. Osteopenia, the first range below normal bone density, signifies low bone density; and osteoporosis refers to all bone density readings that are lower than osteopenia. Osteopenia in itself is not a disease but is a risk factor for the development of osteoporosis. Most of the time, only patients diagnosed with osteoporosis are commenced on treatment, while patients with osteopenia are advised of lifestyle changes, including adequate intake of calcium, normal vitamin D levels and regular weight-bearing exercise. However, if a patient has had a fracture (from a fall from a standing height or less) and has osteopenia on bone density testing, this implies increased bone fragility is present and they will usually also be commenced on treatment to reduce the risk of further fractures.

It is important to remember that treatment variations may occur among people with the same diagnosis, as patients are treated on an individual basis determined by their medical history.

Update: How Dense Are You? Awareness Campaign

Osteoporosis Australia was delighted to have radio and TV personality Jono Coleman on board for our latest promotion. Jono enthusiastically teamed up with Osteoporosis Australia Patron Helen Dalley to record a special online clip promoting the How Dense Are you? awareness campaign. The message is simple – if you are over 50 and have risk factors for low bone density, you may need a bone density scan. Jono and Helen encourage us to ask friends and family ‘How Dense Are you?’ to initiate light-hearted conversation about this important health issue. Check out the new footage on the How Dense Are You? website www.howdenseareyou.org.au

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Vitamin D is an important topic in Australia, particularly at the end of winter when vitamin D levels are usually at their lowest.

Osteoporosis Australia recommends people of all ages have a vitamin D level of at least 50 (nmol/L) throughout the year, which means that levels need to be 10-20 (nmol/L) higher in summer to allow for a seasonal drop.

Vitamin D plays an important role in the body by helping calcium absorption, supporting muscle strength, building strong bones and possibly maintaining the function of the immune system.

Vitamin D expert, Professor Rebecca Mason, says “surprisingly for Australia, over 30% of adults are low in vitamin D, which can significantly affect bone health.” Professor Mason adds, “the good news is vitamin levels can be corrected with limited sun exposure or supplements.”

Certain factors can lead to vitamin D deficiency, for example: avoiding the sun, limited outdoor activity (including working indoors), people in residential care, medical conditions and medications that affect vitamin D levels and darker skin (as greater sunlight exposure is needed).

Low vitamin D, which can also be an issue during pregnancy, childhood and adolescent years, has been associated with a range of health problems, which sometimes extend into adulthood.

When vitamin D deficiency is detected, doctors usually recommend a higher dose vitamin D supplement at first, and then a lower dose for maintenance. Improvements in vitamin D levels can take up to 3-5 months.

Professor Mason says “just 5-10 minutes of sunshine on your arms or legs at mid-morning or mid-afternoon in summer helps to maintain your vitamin D levels.” She recommends people with risk factors for low vitamin D talk to their doctor.

Osteoporosis Awareness during Women’s Health Week

Osteoporosis Australia was a proud supporter of the inaugural Jean Hailes Women’s Health Week (September 2-7).

The purpose of the week was to highlight all aspects of health, including eating well, being active, being connected to others and caring for the people around us as well as ourselves.

The awareness event focused on a different health theme each day, using Wellness, Ourselves, Move, Eat and Network to spell WOMEN.

On day 1 – ‘Wellness’, women were encouraged to participate in health check-ups to prevent any onset of illness and better manage their health. For Osteoporosis Australia, that meant encouraging women to consider the question ‘How Dense Are You?’ and understand the risk factors for low bone density which may require a bone density check-up. Another specially themed day – ‘Move’, was also an important message for healthy bones, as we all need regular weight-bearing and resistance exercise to keep our bones strong! For the event, women were also asked to make an online pledge to improve their health.

Focusing on health, and taking small steps to improve your health each day, can build fantastic results. We congratulate everyone who made a personal health pledge for this event.
**Northern Territory:** Osteoporosis NT has been working with local GPs and health professionals to produce and distribute information folders. Please contact our office on 08 8948 5232 for any enquiries or to receive information.

**ACT:** Arthritis & Osteoporosis ACT is holding a Falls Prevention Expo on October 31 at the Canberra Hellenic Club, Phillip. Make a date with your bones - take the opportunity to discuss your bone health with professionals and see what you can do to keep your bones healthy and happy. To register, call 02 6288 4244.

**TAS:** Osteoporosis Tasmania is about to commence a rural community information and education project in partnership with the Country Women’s Association. Tasmania has a significantly rural and decentralised population. Through this project we will work with the CWA network to provide information on prevention and management of osteoporosis to people in rural and regional areas.

**South Australia:** Osteoporosis SA will run a health professional symposium on Osteoporosis on Saturday November 2, with nearly 100 GPs, nurses, pharmacists, OTs and podiatrists attending. For information on local events, contact our state office on 08 8379 5711.

**New South Wales:** Osteoporosis NSW is holding an osteoporosis education program at Thornleigh on Nov 14 & 21. Run by health professionals, it covers what is osteoporosis, risk factors, exercise, medication, calcium, vitamin D, falls prevention and osteoporosis and men. Cost: $40 for members; $50 for non-members. For more information or to register, contact Eloise Milthorpe on 02 9857 3300 or emilthorpe@arthritisnsw.org.au.

**Queensland:** For information on local events, contact our state office on 07 3857 4200.

**Western Australia:** Arthritis and Osteoporosis Western Australia (AOWA) is continuing to offer its popular Osteoporosis Exercise Program. For further information or to make a booking, phone 08 9388 2199.

**Victoria:** A report into the impact of osteoporosis, arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions by Arthritis and Osteoporosis Victoria revealed a significant cost to the Australian community. The report warns significant investment in musculoskeletal health is needed now as costs escalate with an ageing population. For information on local events contact our state office on 03 8531 8000.

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Baby Red Onions Stuffed with Goats Cheese
by Maggie Beer

Photographer: Tony Lewis

Ingredients

- 6 baby red onions, golf ball size
- 1/4 cup water
- 2 tbspn Vino Cotto
- 1/3 cup goats cheese
- 1/3 cup coarse bread crumbs toasted
- 1/2 packed cup flat leaf parsley chopped
- To taste salt flakes
- 1/3 cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Method

Although it may seem like there are many steps between you and this finished dish, never fear, the numbers will only make it easier!

1. Preheat a fan forced oven to 200°C.
2. Cut a small amount off the base of the onions so that they sit upright. Then, leaving the skins on, cut half a centimetre off the top of the onions.
3. Place the onions into a high sided saucepan around 18 centimetre x 4 centimetre, so that the onions fit snugly, and add the water and Vino Cotto. Place a lid onto the top of the pan and put into the pre heated oven.
4. Cook for 1 hour and 15 minutes until onions are soft through, then remove from the oven.
5. Turn the oven up to 220°C.
6. Turn the onions over, then place back into the oven for 10 minutes to caramelise.
7. Remove from the oven and flip the onions back over and remove from the pan.
8. Using a fork remove a small amount of the centre of the onions and divide the soft goats cheese into the centre of each onion. Place the stuffed onions onto a serving platter and sprinkle with bread crumbs, parsley, season with sea salt and drizzle with the Extra Virgin Olive Oil to serve.

Serves: 3-4 as a side dish
Calcium content: 118.5mg per serve (2 stuffed onions)

For more fantastic recipes and to learn more about Maggie, visit www.maggiebeer.com.au