

# Diet and osteoporosis: 10 foods for healthy bones



1.2 million Australians are affected by osteoporosis ([Healthy Bones Australia](#)). Here's how your diet can help prevent and manage this condition.

## What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a common condition which causes bones to become fragile over time. [Anyone can get it](#), but women are at greater risk than men. For everyone, the risk for developing osteoporosis [increases with age](#).

The genes you inherit can cause osteoporosis. But so can smoking, excessive alcohol intake, not enough calcium or vitamin D, and not moving enough.

Osteoporosis can lead to fractures or broken bones. And this can affect your ability to move and stay independent. But, by making healthy choices, you can prevent and manage this condition.

## What can I do?

Drinking less alcohol and quitting smoking helps. As does [regular low-impact exercise](#), one of the most important things you can do for your health as you age.

Moving your body every day improves and maintains bone health and density ([ESSA 2023](#)). Learn about [exercise for osteoporosis here](#).

Also consider exercises like [Tai Chi](#) and [chair yoga](#) for [falls prevention](#). You can reduce your risk of fractures by doing [balance exercises](#) and building your muscle strength. You'll decrease your chances of falling, as well as your chances of injury in the event of a fall.

And of course, you can eat food that makes your muscles and bones stronger.

## What should I eat?

It's best to minimise your intake of highly processed foods, which may be high in [salt and saturated fats](#). Drinking too much [caffeine](#) or [sugary fizzy drink](#) is also associated with bone loss.

[A balanced diet](#) in general promotes good bone health, too. But for your bones it's important to eat foods that are rich in [calcium](#) and [vitamin D](#).

Calcium gives your bones strength and structure. But it's needed for other important things in your body, too, like your cardiovascular health. So, if you don't have enough calcium in your diet, your bones will give some up and gradually lose density.

Vitamin D has many functions, too. Including helping you absorb calcium. It could also reduce your risk of fractures by increasing your muscle strength. Time in the sun is your biggest source of Vitamin D, though. So, get plenty of that. Be sure to stay [hydrated](#) and [sun safe](#), of course!

Once you have enough calcium and Vitamin D, some other things like [protein](#) will support your bone health even further.

Higher protein diets increase calcium absorption and muscle mass, among other things, which can benefit your bones. But you need sufficient calcium in your diet to get the best of these benefits.

Wondering which foods to choose? Consider the 10 examples below.

## Important

Some chronic conditions may make it so that certain foods aren't for you. Consult your doctor before trying a new diet.

## Here are 10 foods for healthy bones:

### What vegetables to eat

1. Dark leafy greens ([cruciferous vegetables](#)) provide fibre and many useful minerals for bone health. This includes calcium, but also [potassium](#), which helps retain calcium in the bones. There's also [magnesium](#), which helps [activate your vitamin D](#). And it has some [selenium](#), which is believed to be beneficial to bone health as well. Examples of cruciferous vegetables include bok choy, broccoli, kale, and spinach.
2. Tuberous root vegetables, like [potatoes](#) and [sweet potatoes](#), can also be good for bone health. They're better for you when baked or boiled, rather than fried. They aren't especially high in calcium, but they can be a good source of other good things like potassium and magnesium. They also have [vitamin C](#), which is needed to [produce collagen](#) in bones.





## What meats to eat

Poultry and fish can be healthy sources of protein and calcium.

3. Canned fish such as [canned wild salmon](#) is a great source of calcium, magnesium, and healthy fat. The calcium content in a can is so high because it often includes extremely tiny bits of crushed bone. You can check the label to be sure it's wild (not farmed) and includes bone.

Farmed salmon has fewer nutrients, more calories, and a higher ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids. ([NIH 2020](#)). This means it [may be inflammatory](#) and is best consumed in moderation, especially for older adults.

4. Chicken contains calcium and protein as well as many other good things. This includes [zinc](#), [choline](#), and [amino acids](#). All these play a role in bone health.

## Milks and 'milks'

Dairy products and plant-based milks all contain probiotics and prebiotics. These may modulate bone turnover, promoting better bone health ([PMC 2021](#)).

5. Low-fat dairy products like skim milk, yoghurt, and cheese are also a great source of calcium. And they're often fortified with vitamin D.

However, some processed cheeses may have high sodium and polyphosphate. This would offset the benefits of their high calcium content. Acid-curd cheeses like cottage cheese are also high in sodium and relatively low in calcium and potassium. So they don't build bone density ([PMC 2000](#)).

6. Milk alternatives such as soy, almond, rice and oat milks also tend to be fortified with calcium and vitamin D. And they usually have low fat content as well. Just watch out for added sugar.



## Legumes and nuts

Legumes and nuts are great for your bones and heart alike. Two great examples are soy and almond products.

7. Soybeans are low in fat, but high in calcium, protein, fibre, and isoflavones. Soy foods and isoflavones are [indicated to help prevent and treat cancer and osteoporosis](#). Examples of soy foods include edamame, soy milk, and tofu.
8. Almonds are also high in calcium. Though almonds and almond butter may be high in calories as well, almond milk is usually watered down to a fat content of about 1%.

## Fruits can make nutritious treats

Some foods may be high in sugars or fats, even if they're also full of bone-building nutrients. These would still make good treats, if consumed in moderation.

9. Citrus fruits and fruit juices have high vitamin C. Fruit juices are also often fortified with calcium. (And so are breakfast cereals!) But it pays to be conscious of your sugar intake, and always read the ingredients label.
10. Dried figs are another surprisingly rich source of calcium. They do have a high natural sugar content, too, but the fibre they provide helps offset this. Pair them with a high-protein, high-calcium, vitamin D-fortified cheese to create a very nutrient-rich treat. Bon appetite!



## Bone density testing

You can also get bone density scans. It's recommended for women to get scans every two years, starting at 65. For men, testing is recommended from the age of 70. If osteoporosis risk factors are present, testing is recommended for women and men over 50.

## More helpful information

If you would like to find local exercise classes, social activities, and helpful tips, try the [quick quiz](#).

For more detailed information about osteoporosis click on these links:

[Exercise Right](#)

[Healthy Bones Australia](#)

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