

# Bare Bones

By Suze Hargraves

Ever since I was a kid I've been fascinated by what I call "stick season". That's the late fall after all the leaves have fallen, winter and early spring. Call me eccentric (and you wouldn't be the first) but being able to see the bare bones of nature in the structure of the trees just rocks my artist's sensibilities. Yesterday, as I was studying the lines of a defoliated tree in my yard, I got to thinking about human bones. Yes, I know, my mind does have a strange track, but let's follow it and see what we can learn about our bones and how to care for them.

There are 206 bones in the adult human body. The biggest bone in the body is the femur and the smallest is the stapes bone in the middle ear. You actually have two skeletons. You've got an axial skeleton to which the appendicular skeleton is attached. On average your skeletal system makes up 14% of your body weight. Fascinating stuff, but how do we care for it?

The foundation for healthy bones starts during the growing years. The teen years are critical. By around age 17, 90% of a person's bone mass is established. This is the time for lots of calcium and weight bearing exercise (this means walking, running etc. not just working with weights). 1300 mg per day is the recommended amount for these years. An obvious choice for calcium is milk and dairy products but if, for one reason or another, those aren't a part of your household's diet, you can turn to fortified foods, soy, salmon, tofu, most dark leafy green veggies, white beans, baked beans, peas, brussel sprouts, sesame seeds, almonds and more. For more information on dairy product alternatives go to [http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/nutrition/calcium\\_non\\_dairy.html](http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/nutrition/calcium_non_dairy.html).

Besides calcium, Vitamin D and other essential vitamins and minerals are imperative to bone health. Getting the right doses does not mean spending a fortune on supplements. It means being a smart consumer and paying attention to the foods you eat. Go to [http://www.bestbonesforever.gov/images/grocery\\_list.pdf](http://www.bestbonesforever.gov/images/grocery_list.pdf) and print yourself a bone health friendly grocery list before your next shopping trip. Not only is this a great tool to make sure you're buying healthy food, but it's also a great way to allow kids to participate in making healthy choices at the grocery store.

If you're going to supplement your diet don't fall prey to gimmicks. It's all about being a savvy consumer. Know what you need. Visit [http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=4&tax\\_level=1&tax\\_subject=242](http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=4&tax_level=1&tax_subject=242) and get your facts before you shop. Always let your healthcare provider know about any herbs or other supplements you are taking. There can be life threatening issues with drug interactions if you don't disclose everything you are taking to your provider. Always try to get all your drugs at the same pharmacy. That way, if you have a question about a supplement, not only will the pharmacist know you, but they will also have on-the-spot access to your records to check for dangerous drug interactions.

Lifestyle is a critical factor in bone health. That weight bearing exercise criteria doesn't disappear after your teen years. Move it or lose it folks. Your bones are living tissue and just like any living tissue they respond to exercise by getting stronger. You also get the added bonus of building up muscle strength which also helps prevent injuries to bone. Also, filed under Lifestyle Tips for Bone Health is the ol' "Don't smoke and don't drink in excess". Common sense-those two are never good for you.

When we take care of our bones we can, barring genetic conditions, expect them to behave for a long, long time. Even when we do face obstacles to bone health like arthritis and osteoporosis, being proactive can help us control those conditions to some degree.

Make like a tree and live a long, strong, healthy life by caring for your bones.

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