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Calcium and Exercise to Strengthen the Bones

(InformedHealth) A stumble, a fall - a broken bone: many older people are afraid of this happening. The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care published information today about how you can protect yourself. Research shows that regular adequate intake of calcium and exercise can strengthen the bones. But many people do not know whether they are getting enough calcium in their diets. The Institute has developed a calculator at www.informedhealthonline.org (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/informed-health-online.2.en.html>) that can help you estimate if you are getting enough calcium.

Regular intake of calcium protects the bones

Getting older does not necessarily mean that you will get osteoporosis. However, the risk of osteoporosis does rise as we get older, and people over 70 often have brittle bones. A fall does not only mean bruises then, but it is easier for a bone to break. There are several ways to protect and strengthen bones, even when you are already older.

One important way is to get enough calcium regularly. To stop our bones losing too much strength we need an increasing amount of calcium as we get older. The best way to get it is with a calcium-rich diet. "Older people in particular are often not getting enough calcium," according to the Institute's Director, Professor Peter Sawicki.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a minimum daily intake of calcium of 1,300 mg for women after the menopause and men over the age of 65. The Institute developed an online calculator for its website with the help of the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin. The calculator helps you find out quickly and easily roughly how much calcium you are getting through your diet every day and whether that is enough.

If you cannot get enough calcium in your diet, then calcium supplements could help. Trials have shown that taking daily calcium supplements can help protect people who are at high risk of bone fracture. According to Professor Sawicki, "Even when you are already over 70, you can reduce your risk of bone fracture if you get enough calcium."

Exercise strengthens the bones and might help reduce the risk of falling

Some people believe that they can best protect themselves by not moving around too much and trying to avoid situations where they might have a chance of falling. But in reality being too immobile is one of the major risk factors for osteoporosis. If you spend a large part of the day sitting or lying down, your bones are more likely to become weak and brittle. Physical activity that involves carrying your weight can actually strengthen your bones. One of the easier ways to get exercise with a low risk of injury is brisk walking. According to the Institute, even in older age, walking is a simple way of getting enough exercise that people feel comfortable with - and it benefits more than the bones, as well.

Professor Sawicki said: "Injury is of course always possible when you exercise. But people who are more active strengthen their muscles and bones - and that can help them stay physically stable and secure. People may gain more confidence in their bodies and that might mean a lower risk of stumbling and falling."



