



Donna Shanklin
Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Growing Girls and Bone Health

Bone is living tissue made up of specialized bone cells. Bones are being broken down and renewed constantly. From birth, more bone is made than is broken down, and so bones grow. Bone growth is nearly complete by the end of puberty, with only a small increase in bone strength occurring after the late teenage years. Defined as the period of peak bone mass, this is generally the time when bones are at their strongest. The higher the peak bone mass, the greater protection the skeleton has against the effects of ageing. This is one reason it is so important for youth to build up their bones. Many tweens and teens are not getting enough calcium and vitamin D, the primarily building blocks of bones.

Women are at greater risk for developing osteoporosis, a disease in which bones become fragile and more likely to break. Therefore, it is important for young girls to get enough calcium and vitamin D. The Institute of Medicine of the National Academies and the National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements recommend that girls ages 9 to 18 need 1,300 milligrams of calcium daily and 200 international units (IU) of vitamin D daily.

Vitamin D helps the body use calcium. Calcium cannot do its job without vitamin D. Girls in this age range need more calcium and vitamin D than their female counterparts in the 19 to 41 age range.

Tips for protecting yours and your child's bones:

- **Get enough calcium each day.** Choose foods high in calcium. If you are not getting enough, talk to your doctor. He or she might recommend a dietary supplement.
- **Get your vitamin D.** Vitamin D is usually added to milk and can be found in fatty fish such as tuna (in oil), salmon or mackerel. Many foods may be fortified with vitamin D, such as cereals, yogurt and tofu. Sunlight is also a source of vitamin D. If you are not sure you are getting enough vitamin D, ask your doctor. You may need a simple blood test that can tell if you are getting enough vitamin D or if you need a supplement.
- **Work your bones.** Adults need at least 2 1/2 hours of physical activity per week. This can be done 10 minutes at a time. Children, including girls 9 to 18, need 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Walking or running, jumping rope and lifting weights are great exercises for bones.

Check out the Health and Human Services Web site Best Bones Forever at <http://www.bestbonesforever.gov> for more information about calcium and vitamin D and their roles in building and maintaining strong bones. The site has Bone Building shopping lists for

parents and games for youth. Your local Alabama Cooperative Extension office and Web site, www.aces.edu, has information about diet and exercise that can help you in educating yourself and your children about the importance of eating and exercising throughout your life.

For more information please contact Donna R. Shanklin, Regional Extension Agent-Health, Human Nutrition, Diet and Health at the St. Clair County Extension office at 205 338-9416 or e-mail at drs0009@aces.edu.