

Women's Health



Bone Density & Osteoporosis

As women age, they need to build bone density to reduce their risk of fractures and developing osteoporosis.

Bone density is a measure of the amount of mineral content in bones and it is important for maintaining strong bones. Osteoporosis is a condition in which bones become weak and brittle.

Women are at a higher risk of developing it than men are due to factors such as hormonal changes, smaller bone size and lower bone density. Post-menopausal women are at particular risk. One in five women over age 50 suffer from osteoporosis while only one in 20 men do. Among women, it primarily affects white and Asian women. John Hopkins Medicine reports that 50% of women over 50 will break a bone because of osteoporosis during their lifetime.

EFFECTS OF OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis can increase the risk of fractures, particularly in the hips, spine and wrists. These fractures can lead to disability and sometimes be life-threatening in older adults. Osteoporosis can also cause pain and limit movement, leading to decreased mobility and a lower quality of life.

Fractures and decreased mobility can lead to a loss of



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independence and a need for long-term care. It can also be costly, even with insurance. Those who suffer from it sometimes end up experiencing depression and social isolation.

OTHER FACTORS

Cigarette smoking and heavy alcohol consumption can increase the risk of osteoporosis, so the National Institutes of Health recommends eliminating both those

habits for those who are at risk. People who are physically inactive or have had prolonged periods of bedrest are also at great risk.

Some medications can increase the potential of osteoporosis, including corticosteroids, proton pump inhibitors and antiepileptic medications. Women who have too little estrogen or too much thyroid hormone are at greater risk as are people who are underweight.

bone density. When you lift weights or use resistance bands, you create tension in your muscles and bones, which triggers the cells responsible for bone growth and repair.

DIET

Calcium and vitamin D can help improve bone density.

Calcium is a mineral that builds and maintains strong bones while vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium. Good sources of calcium include dairy products, leafy green vegetables and fortified foods such as cereal and orange juice. Vitamin D is found in milk, sunlight, fortified foods and supplements.

John Hopkins Medicine recommends 1,000 mg daily for women 50 years and under and 1,200 mg daily for women 51 and older.

Protein also helps increase bone mineral density and can be found in animal or nonanimal food sources.

PREVENT FALLING

The National Institute on Aging lists several things a person can do to make it less likely they will fall, break a bone and increase their risk for osteoporosis. It starts with exercise that increases strength and balance. They then recommend using a cane or walker if it helps you be more steady and standing up slowly.

Install night lights and grab bars in your bathroom. Be extra careful about using stairs when it is raining or snowing.

EXERCISE

One effective way to build bone density is through weight-bearing exercises. Weight-bearing exercises are any activities that force you to work against gravity, such as weightlifting, jogging, jumping or dancing. These exercises place stress on your bones, which stimulates the cells that build new bone tissue, making them stronger and denser.

Strength training can be especially effective for building

Occupational Hazards

While women have been achieving equity in most occupational areas, they face unique health concerns and risks in fields that are still male-dominated.

According to FairyGodBoss, occupations which are still male-dominated include aircraft piloting, agriculture, architecture, clergy, construction, finance, firefighting, information technology, manufacturing and software development. Even some integrated occupations are still gender-segregated when it comes to individual positions. Most chemistry professors are men. Most elementary literacy coaches are women.

And even in those fields where women are starting to make an incursion, there are very few women of color.

Science Daily cites research that has shown women in male-dominated fields encounter “social isolation, performance pressures, sexual harassment, obstacles to mobility, moments of both high visibility and invisibility, co-workers’ doubts about their competence and low levels of workplace social support.” All of this, they report, causes vulnerability to disease and mortality “through dysregulation of the human body’s stress response.”



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PHYSICAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Women in male-dominated fields may be required to perform physically demanding tasks or work in environments that are not designed with women’s safety and health in mind. Protective equipment is often designed for male bodies and machinery configured for men. Male standards are used for equipment settings, temperature and scheduling.

Women in construction or manufacturing jobs may be more susceptible to musculoskeletal injuries as well as exposure to hazardous materials and equipment. In some

cases, resources are not available to women that are to men such as changing rooms or places to wash.

Women who work in male-dominated fields may have limited access to reproductive health services, including contraception and family planning. They may be exposed to chemicals or other hazards that can affect their reproductive health.

MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Women in male-dominated fields may face discrimination, harassment and bullying, which can have a negative

effect on their mental health and well-being. This can lead to anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders.

BetterUp conducted research in 2021 that showed women, especially those in male-dominated fields, experienced far more workplace stress than men did. They are more likely to experience burn-out and stress-related illnesses.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

The culture of male-dominated fields is often exclusionary. There is a higher incidence of sexual harassment and a culture of sexism that believes women are not capa-

ble of achieving the same things that men are. In some fields, men are praised for the way the job makes them look (dirty and grimy) while women are shamed for the same look.

Some workplace environments fail to provide opportunities for women to articulate their concerns or participate in creating a healthier workplace.

Women in male-dominated fields may face challenges in balancing their work and personal life. Because of the pressure of being a “token woman,” many women end up putting in more hours than their male counterparts, leading to stress and burnout.

STEPS TO TAKE

Being aware of unique health concerns is important for women in male-dominated fields so they know what steps they can take to protect themselves and their well-being. This may include seeking out support from colleagues — having female mentors is a strong indicator of success as that person can help problem-solve gender-related issues. Forbes also recommends seeking out male allies who can advocate for you.

Support your co-workers, especially other women.

Trust your skills and be assertive about owning your career path. Try not to be easily offended and learn how to handle conflict. Advocate for better workplace policies and practices that support women’s health and safety.

Lead In Lipstick

There has been growing concern about the amount of lead contamination people ingest by wearing lipstick.

Both the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics — along with other researchers — have found lead and other toxic materials in many lipsticks, including some of the most popular and high-end brands.

LEAD CONCERNS

Lead is a toxic heavy metal that can cause serious health problems such as neurological damage, reproductive issues and cancer. Lead is a common impurity found in some of the ingredients used to make lipstick, such as color additives and mineral pigments.

Medical experts say that there is no safe level of lead exposure. It has been linked to learning, language and behavioral problems. Men and women both suffer from reduced fertility. Girls exposed can have a delayed onset of puberty and it can cause hormonal changes and menstrual irregularities for women of all ages.

While lipstick is not a food product, it is ingested when someone wearing it eats or drinks. Lead can also be absorbed through the skin. Lead accumulates over time



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and does not easily break down, so accumulated use causes a problem even though lead levels are considered not dangerous for a single application.

TESTING

In 2007, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics released a study showing that lead was found in 61% of all lipsticks, with levels ranging up to 0.65 parts per million (ppm). The FDA followed with a test in 2009 that found 99% of all cosmetics contained less than .10 ppm. However, it found lead in all lipstick samples ranging from .09 to 3.06.

In 2016, the FDA released guidelines recommending a maximum level of lead in all cosmetic products. However, these are guidelines and the FDA does not enforce them. The agency states that it expects cosmetic manufacturers to take responsibility for the safety of their products and to ensure that they are not contaminated with harmful levels of lead.

OTHER LIPSTICK DANGERS

Lead isn't the only concern when it comes to lipstick. University of California researchers found nine more

toxic heavy metals in lip glosses and lipsticks: chromium, cadmium, aluminum, manganese and lead.

The cosmetics industry has said that lipsticks are safe because the dose of toxic metals is so low per application. However, this ignores the issue of cumulative exposure — the dangers posed by a small amount of a toxic chemical ingested over a long period of time. The University of California researchers found that women applied lipstick anywhere from two to 14 times every day. This translates into ingesting or absorbing as much as 87 milligrams

of product each day. That leads to significant exposure to lead.

ACTIONS TO TAKE

First, keep lipstick away from children. Don't let them eat or play with it. If you are pregnant or nursing, don't wear makeup.

Research which lipsticks have low levels of lead, keeping in mind that each shade has a different lead content.

Consider wearing lipstick only for special occasions and using lip balm the rest of the time. Wipe your lipstick off before eating or drinking.

Post-partum Depression

Post-partum depression is a serious condition that affects many new mothers.

It is caused by a combination of hormonal changes, stress and a lack of sleep and can have a profound effect on a mother's physical and emotional well-being. The National Institute for Health calls it a common complication of childbearing that has increasingly been identified as a national health problem.

IDENTIFYING POST-PARTUM DEPRESSION

The Office on Women's Health encourages women to reach out for help if they find themselves feeling empty, emotionless or sad all the time for two weeks or more during or after pregnancy. Another symptom can be not feeling an attachment to the newborn infant. If a mother has thoughts of hurting herself or her infant and she is crying a lot, it's time to call for help.

Many new mothers feel ashamed of their symptoms or feel guilty that they are depressed at a time when everyone tells them they should be happy. It's important to know that having depression does not make you a bad mom. There is nothing wrong with reaching out for help so that you and the baby do not have to continue to suffer.



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TRADITIONAL TREATMENTS

Traditional treatments for post-partum depression include therapy, medication and, in extreme cases, electroconvulsive therapy.

Talk therapy puts mothers in contact with a mental health professional who can

help provide them with coping strategies to deal with depression. They can help the mothers sort out what sort of thinking is caused by the depression and what to do about it.

A couple different courses of action are available for those who choose medication.

Antidepressants can relieve symptoms, though they may take a few weeks to take effect. Some are safe to take while breastfeeding. The Food and Drug Administration has approved brexanolone to treat post-partum depression. It is administered through an IV by a medical practitioner over a

period of two and a half days. It is not safe for a woman who is pregnant or breastfeeding. A third option is esketamine that is given as a nasal spray, but it is also unsafe for pregnant or nursing mothers.

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

For mothers uncomfortable with the above procedures or who are nursing and want to avoid them, there are some alternative approaches available.

New mothers who engage in regular exercise may experience a reduction in symptoms. Mindfulness techniques such as meditation or deep breathing exercises can help new mothers manage their stress and anxiety.

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese practice that involves inserting thin needles into specific points on the body. Some new mothers may find that acupuncture can help alleviate symptoms of depression.

Others turn to herbal remedies, though they should be taken only under the advice of a medical professional, because they can interact with other medicines. Some people take St. John's Wort or SAMe.

Support groups are a valuable resource for new mothers struggling with post-partum depression. These groups provide a safe and supportive environment where women can share their experiences and connect with others who are going through the same thing.

Recognizing Stroke Symptoms

Strokes show up differently in men and women.

Men are generally at a higher risk of having a stroke than women, but women tend to have more severe strokes and have a higher risk of dying from a stroke.

According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, strokes have a greater effect on women than men because women have more events and are less likely to recover, even though men have a higher age-specific stroke rate. Some of this is because there are more older women than older men and they have more years in which they are at risk for stroke.

HIGHER RISK

The UT Southwestern Medical Center lists six reasons why women are at a higher risk for stroke than men. They include postmenopausal changes (including conditions that increase after menopause such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes), pre-eclampsia/eclampsia (this doubles a woman's stroke risk for years after pregnancy), cerebrovascular disorders (aneurysms and hemorrhaging), migraines with aura, hypertension and atrial fibrillation.

Hormonal differences can also be a factor. Women who take hormonal birth control may have an increased risk of stroke and going through menopause increases one's risk due to changing hormone levels.



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Smoking is a stronger risk factor for women than it is for men.

Race and ethnicity also play a role in a person's stroke risks. African Americans have a higher risk of stroke than other racial groups and Hispanic women may have a higher risk of stroke than Hispanic men.

SYMPTOMS

While some symptoms are common for all stroke victims, women may experience atypical symptoms.

Common symptoms include balance issues, vision problems, face drooping, arm

weakness, difficulty with speech, numbness or paralysis on one side of the body, dizziness and severe headache with no known cause.

Women also experience symptoms such as sudden pain in the face or limbs, hiccups, nausea or vomiting, chest pain, fatigue, shortness of breath and a racing heartbeat. Women are also more likely than men to report cognitive dysfunction.

Because these symptoms are often non-specific, women can take longer to recognize that they are having a stroke. Research has shown that women take three times longer

than men to seek care for stroke because they feel they can manage the symptoms.

Early treatment can make a difference in how and whether a person recovers, which is why it is important for women to recognize how their symptoms might differ from the ones they are familiar with.

PREVENTION

Much of the activities related to stroke prevention are those that are common for living a healthy lifestyle. Doctors recommend eating in moderation and including leafy greens, fruits and lean meats in the

diet. They also suggest moderate exercise three to four times a week.

If you have high blood pressure, you should check your blood pressure daily from home and provide your doctor with the readouts.

Reduce your stress levels. Engage in self-care activities such as walks with friends, meditation or yoga. Go get yourself that massage you've been wanting.

Get routine wellness checks. Your doctor can help you identify any existing risk factors and work with you to prevent new ones from developing.

Social Media & Body Image

Social media has become inexorably tied to body image for women, leading to complex issues, especially for the youngest generations.

A Gen Z woman recently remarked that she thinks because of social media and its photo filters, it is impossible to not have body dysphoria. Demand Sage reports that Millennials and Gen Z are the most frequent users of social media platforms. In the U.S., 76% of all women have a social media account.

BEAUTY STANDARDS

Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have become breeding grounds for beauty standards, where influencers and celebrities present their “perfect” and “ideal” images. These images create unrealistic beauty standards, which can lead to a negative body image and self-esteem issues among women.

The American Academy of Facial and Reconstructive Surgery has reported a 30% increase in patients who tell surgeons that they want to “improve their image on social media.”

In an interview with Forbes, psychiatrist Helen Egger said people are striving to achieve the “Instagram Face,” a look that involves “high cheek-



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bones, poreless skin, cat-like eyes and plump lips...It doesn't support individuality; it supports conformity with the standard of beauty.”

According to a study published in January 2022 in “Adolescent Research Review,” looking at these filtered, idealized images on social media leads to increased body dissatisfaction among both young women and men.

COMPARISON AND COMPETITION

Social media can be a platform for constant comparison and competition, leading to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among women. Images and content that people share are often carefully curated and edited, leading to an unrealistic portrayal of people's lives.

These elements can exacer-

bate mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and eating disorders among women. Studies have shown that excessive social media use can lead to increased feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem and negative body image.

SOLUTIONS

Given all the good that social media can do, the

answer isn't to eliminate it, but to find ways to make social media use more healthy. Education is key to helping women understand the negative effect that social media can have on their mental health and body image. Providing resources and promoting awareness can empower women to make informed choices about their social media use.

Promoting media literacy helps women become more aware of the ways in which social media images are curated and edited. It encourages them to question the images they see and identify unrealistic beauty standards so they can build resilience to negative social media influences.

Social media platforms can play a role in promoting positive representations of women's bodies and promoting diverse and inclusive beauty standards. By featuring a range of body types and skin tones, social media can help to challenge narrow beauty ideals and promote body positivity.

Women also need to make self-care and mental health a top priority. This can include practices such as mindfulness, meditation and social support networks. Taking breaks from social media can be an effective way to reduce its negative effects. Setting limits on social media lets women create space for self-reflection and participating in offline activities that bring joy and fulfillment.

Spa Services to Avoid

With some celebrities endorsing pseudo-science treatments, spas are starting to offer vaginal health treatments that are less than healthy.

Vaginal facials, also known as vajacials, are becoming increasingly popular at spas and salons, but there are concerns about their safety and effectiveness. Others spas are offering “yoni steamings” in which women sit on a stool above a steaming pot of water infused with herbs, which is said to promote vaginal health and cleanse the uterus.

There are reasons to avoid both.

There is little scientific evidence to support their effectiveness. The vagina is a self-cleaning organ and does not require external treatments to maintain its health. In fact, introducing new products and treatments to the vagina can disrupt its natural balance and lead to irritation, infections and other health problems.

VAJACIAL

Vajacials are actually performed on the vulva and not the vagina, which is the internal canal. The vajacial focuses on the area where pubic hair grows. They are often used in cooperation with hair removal techniques which can cause ingrown hairs, inflammation and blackheads, which the



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vajacial purports to treat.

Vajacials typically involve the use of exfoliating scrubs, masks and other products that can irritate and damage the delicate vaginal tissues. These products can also introduce harmful bacteria and other microorganisms into the vagina, increasing the risk of infection.

The promotion of vajacials

can contribute to the shame and stigma surrounding women's bodies, by suggesting that the vagina needs to be “cleaned” or “perfected” in some way. This can lead to negative body image and self-esteem issues for women.

In an interview with Healthline, Dr. Leah Millheiser, an OB-GYN, professor at Stanford University

Medical Center and women's health expert, says vajacials are not medically necessary and no woman should feel like she has to have one. She points out that most estheticians are not experts in vulvar skin which is very different from the skin on the face. The service can often cause the very symptoms that they are advertised as being able

to treat.

YONI STEAMING

Also known as vaginal steaming or V-steaming, yoni steaming has little scientific evidence to support the health claims it makes and some health experts have expressed concerns about its safety.

Risks associated with yoni steaming include burns or scalding and irritation or infection when steam and herbs disrupt the natural balance of bacteria and pH levels. Similar to vajacials, promoting yoni steaming can contribute to the shame and stigma surrounding women's bodies.

It is especially dangerous for pregnant women as it can cause birth defects in a fetus and other complications.

ALTERNATIVES

Instead of either of these services, women can focus on maintaining good vaginal health through healthy habits. Wear breathable, cotton underwear and avoid tight-fitting clothing that traps moisture and bacteria. Wash the external genital area with warm water, avoiding douching or using scented products.

Eat a healthy diet and stay hydrated, which reduces the risk of infections. Practice safe sex and get regular STI screenings.

Perhaps most important is for women to listen to their bodies and seek medical attention if they experience any unusual symptoms or discomfort.