A Recipe for Healthy Bones

In order for children to have healthy bones, they need enough calcium in their diets and sufficient time spent in regular physical activity. As a parent, you can help ensure your child is getting enough of each of these ingredients to develop and maintain healthy bones!

Calcium is a mineral that the body needs for numerous functions, including building and maintaining bones and teeth, blood clotting, the transmission of nerve impulses, and the regulation of the heart’s rhythm. Ninety-nine percent of the calcium in the human body is stored in the bones and teeth. One important way the body gets the calcium it needs is by eating foods that contain calcium. Good sources include dairy products and dark leafy greens or dried beans.

Physical activity that puts some strain or stress on bones causes the bones to retain and possibly even gain density throughout life. Cells within the bone sense this stress and respond by making the bone stronger and denser. Such “weight-bearing” exercises include walking, dancing, jogging, weightlifting, stair-climbing, racquet sports, and hiking. In addition, physical activity doesn't strengthen all bones, just those that are stressed, so you need a variety of exercises or activities to keep all your bones healthy. Another function of physical activity, probably at least as important as its direct effect on bone mass, is its role in increasing muscle strength and coordination. With greater muscle strength, one can often avoid falls and situations that cause fractures. Making physical activity a habit can help maintain balance and avoid falls.


Tips for getting more calcium in your child’s diet  (Source: www.kidshealth.org)

Add cheese to meals and snacks:

- Put some cheddar in an omelet.
- Add a slice of American, Swiss, or provolone to sandwiches.
- Serve whole-grain crackers with low-fat cheese as an afternoon treat.
- Make grilled cheese sandwiches or slices of cheese appealing by using cookie cutters to create hearts, stars, and favorite animal shapes.
- Top vegetables (especially those that usually prompt an "Ick!" or an "Ew!") with melted low-fat cheese.
Put some pizzazz in regular milk by adding a touch of strawberry or chocolate syrup (which doesn't tack on a significant amount of sugar or calories). Steer clear of store-bought flavored milk drinks, though, which can be packed with unnecessary sugar. For breakfast, add fresh fruit or unsweetened apple butter to cottage cheese.

For dessert or an afternoon snack:
- Serve low-fat or fat-free frozen yogurt topped with fruit.
- Create parfaits with layers of plain yogurt, fruit, and whole-grain cereal.
- Give your child a glass of ice-cold milk to dunk or wash down a couple of favorite whole-grain cookies or graham crackers.

Offer your child plenty of nondairy foods that still pack a calcium punch:
- Add white beans to your child's favorite soups.
- Top salads or cereals with slivered almonds and chickpeas.
- Serve chili with red beans and cheese.
- Pour a tall glass of calcium-fortified juice for breakfast.
- On grocery-shopping excursions, look for calcium-fortified foods, including breads and cereals.
- Serve more dark green leafy vegetables (such as broccoli, kale, collard greens, or Chinese cabbage) with meals.