

Managing Bone Health

Osteoporosis, or “porous bones”, is a serious issue for breast cancer survivors. Women are about twice as likely as men to develop osteoporosis, and some treatments for breast cancer may lead to bone loss. Preventing osteoporosis depends upon building up strong bones before the age of 30 and limiting bone loss in adulthood. A variety of lifestyle factors may help with this.

Tips for Optimizing Bone Health:

- Get regular exercise, particularly weight-bearing exercise such as walking, dancing, jogging, weightlifting, and hiking. Activity that puts strain on the bone can cause the bone to retain or gain density and strength.
- Adequate calcium intake throughout life is an established factor, which promotes bone health. However, the optimal intake of dairy products has not been well determined, and you should focus on getting calcium from non-dairy sources. A few of these include: leafy green vegetables, white beans, canned salmon (with bones), blackstrap molasses, and black-eyed peas. Our Salmon and Avocado Salad recipe includes some of these ingredients.

- **Salmon and Avocado Salad**

The Mediterranean diet has had the most consistently positive results when studied for health benefits, compared to any other diet pattern. This is largely attributed to the healthy fats eaten in the Mediterranean region – salmon, avocados, and olive oil to name a few. Patients often complain that fresh, quality salmon is difficult to find or very expensive, so this recipe serves as a solution to those issues and is a better tasting and healthy substitute for a traditional tuna salad. Look for canned, wild Alaskan salmon in a BPA free can (such as “Wild Planet” brand).

- 2 ounces canned or cooked salmon (preferably wild Alaskan)
- ½ ripe avocado
- ¼ teaspoon lemon juice
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Mash the avocado and lemon juice with a fork. Add the salmon, and mix until well combined, adding olive oil if the mixture is dry. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Serve salmon salad on a bed of arugula or as an open faced sandwich.

- Get enough vitamin D. Vitamin D plays a role in a number of health functions, and research seems to be uncovering more and more about its importance. When blood levels of calcium begin to drop, vitamin D encourages calcium absorption in the intestines and promotes bone health in that way. It is difficult to obtain adequate vitamin D from food, though some sources include: cod liver oil, eggs, fortified dairy products, and salmon. Vitamin D is also made by the skin through exposure to sunlight in the summer months, though, sunscreens block its formation. Thus, it is important to have your blood level of vitamin D checked and to take a supplement if indicated. Vitamin D is not a standard lab, so you may have to request that your doctor take this. Have your vitamin D checked seasonally (every 3-4 months) to monitor for deficiency in the months that you may not be exposed to much sunlight. Many people that live in the Northern United States need about 2000iu of vitamin D per day, though, others may need more or less than this. Be aware that Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, and it may become toxic at a certain level. Follow your healthcare provider’s recommendations to avoid any issues.

- Research has demonstrated that adequate intake of vitamin K aids in calcium regulation and the formation of bones, and eating at least one serving of leafy green vegetables per day can significantly reduce the risk of fractures.
- Avoid drinking more than 4 cups of coffee per day, as excess caffeine intake can promote calcium excretion in urine.
- Avoid drinking colas, as these contain high levels of phosphorus, which may weaken bones.
- Adequate protein intake is important for general health. However, very high protein diets may cause calcium to leach from bones and increase the risk for fractures over time. Talk to your nutritionist about the appropriate amount of protein for your weight, activity level, and health.
- Avoid vitamin A supplements in the form of retinol, as these may promote fractures.