



4 TIPS TO KEEP YOUR BONES AND JOINTS HEALTHY

Over six million Canadians have bone or joint health problems, including arthritis, rheumatism, osteoporosis, and injuries resulting from sporting activities or falls.

Luckily, you can take steps to help decrease your chances of experiencing bone and joint disease and/or injury. Experts agree that the best way to protect your bones and joints is to prevent injuries altogether. However, since it is not always possible to avoid accidents, it is important to treat injuries promptly and care for them properly. Whether you already have a bone or joint disease, are recovering from an injury, or are simply looking for ways to keep those bones and joints in working order, here are four tips to reduce injury and help maintain bone and joint health.

1 Exercise regularly and start young

Exercising “feeds” your joint cartilage (the hard-protective tissue at the ends of your bones). Without healthy activity, your joint cartilage will go hungry, and your bones will be less able to absorb nutrients and remove waste. Regular exercise also strengthens the muscles, tendons, and ligaments that cushion and protect your joints and keep them flexible. If you already exercise regularly, or if you are just beginning to include physical activity in your routine, here are some suggestions for taking proper care of your bones and joints while exercising:

- ✓ Warm up and stretch before any type of physical activity.
- ✓ Incorporate moderate to high-intensity exercises into your routine, such as swimming, which enables you to gradually develop your overall strength without putting pressure on your joints.
- ✓ Try strength and balance training, using free weights and/or weight machines to improve muscle strength and physical fitness, and to help decrease joint pain over time.
- ✓ Incorporate balance and flexibility exercises, such as yoga and tai chi. These low-impact, slow motion exercises are designed to increase flexibility and muscle strength, improve your balance, and reduce pain.

If you have a joint disease, such as arthritis, you may be experiencing joint pain, swelling, and/or inflammation. Luckily, exercising every day may help alleviate your discomfort and increase flexibility. Always make sure to use careful movements while engaged in physical activity.

Finally, talk to your physiotherapist or your doctor before beginning any exercise program, especially if you are a senior or if you are overweight. A health care professional can make sure your exercise program is adjusted for your needs and suggest certain modifications and/or low impact exercises.



2 Maintain a healthy weight

Being overweight puts extra stress on your joints. Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight will not only reduce this strain but also help prevent several other conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes. What you eat and drink matters: a well-balanced diet can help you reach a healthier weight, and better food and lifestyle choices can help you maintain your bone health.

Did you know?

Osteoporosis Canada provides a [table to calculate your daily calcium requirements](#) and a [list of calcium-rich foods](#) which helps build bones.

— Milk, cheese, yogurt, canned fish with bones (e.g., sardines).

There are also alternatives for people with lactose intolerance or people on a vegan or plant-based diet:

— Broccoli; Brussels sprouts; beans; calcium-fortified soy, almond and rice beverages; calcium-fortified orange juice; canned white beans; tofu.

It is important to get enough [vitamin D](#) in your diet. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium and increase muscle strength.

— Milk; margarine; salmon; canned tuna; egg yolks; mushrooms; vitamin D-fortified soy, almond and rice beverages; and vitamin D-fortified orange juice.

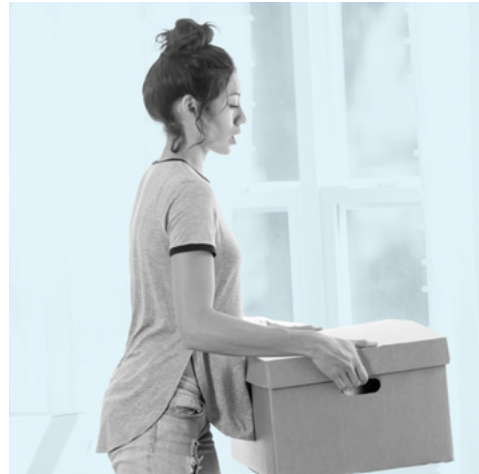
i Note: Caffeinated and alcoholic beverages can block calcium absorption and contribute to bone loss.



It is a good idea to talk to your family doctor or [a dietitian](#) about which foods will provide you with enough calcium, vitamin D, and other important nutrients to help protect your bones. These health care specialists can also advise you on which foods will help you maintain a healthy weight as well as which ones will help build strong muscles to protect your joints.

3 Protect your joints every day

Poor posture, such as slouching or lifting heavy objects incorrectly, can put excess stress on your body. Correct posture encourages proper joint alignment and can decrease unwanted strain on your joints. Maintaining proper posture and carrying heavy objects close to your body are ways to help protect your joints. It is also a good idea to alternate physically demanding, repetitive tasks with lighter ones, and to change your position frequently (e.g., every 30 minutes).



Bad posture

Sit with your knees close to your chest. Alternatively, get yourself a footrest; resting your feet on an object can reduce the pressure in your lower back.



Heavy grocery bags

Carry heavy objects close to your body and use your larger, stronger joints to do the work (i.e., hips and knees). When you can, slide, push, or roll heavy things rather than carrying them.



Demanding, repetitive housework

Alternate the tougher tasks with lighter ones. Stretch before you begin housework, and change positions carefully (e.g., bend at the knees instead of using your back).



Sitting in front of the computer all day

Adjust your chair so that you are at eye level with your screen. Your elbows and forearms should be at 90° angles and should be supported by armrests. Hips, thighs, knees, and ankles should be parallel to the ground. On your break, try the "[Top 10 Exercises](#)" suggested by the Arthritis Society.



Inactivity

Maintain a balance between activity and rest—a sedentary lifestyle can result in a "stiffening" of your joints. Remember to get up and move around at timed intervals throughout the day (e.g., every 30 minutes) to keep your joints limber. In other words, use it or lose it!



On your feet all day

When you can, alternate between sitting and standing during the day. If this is not possible due to your job, ensure that you are wearing comfortable and supportive shoes. Stretch your feet (by standing on your tip toes) and toes (by wiggling them). Standing on a rubbery surface or carpet can also reduce leg and lower back strain. Avoid wearing high heels.

4 Be careful!

Whether you love to participate in high-intensity sports, like to fill your weekend with all of your favourite people and places, or put your heart and soul into your work, be mindful of what too much of anything can do to your body. For example, spending long hours gardening or on the computer can put unwanted strain on your joints. Know your limits! Don't overexert yourself.

Make sure to always take the proper precautions:

- [Assess an activity or sport before you start.](#)
- [Warm up before any high-intensity physical activity, and stretch afterwards.](#)
- [Learn how to prevent injuries around the home.](#)
- Apply and reapply sunscreen as needed when you are soaking up the sun for a natural dose of vitamin D

Key Websites

[Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation](#)

[Osteoporosis Canada](#)

[Arthritis Society](#)





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