Building healthy bones at any age

Building and maintaining healthy bones that last a lifetime begins in childhood and should continue throughout your life.

"It’s important to build bone mass when you’re young because by the time you are in your thirties, the cells that build bones become less efficient" explains Dr. John Flannery, Medical Director of the Musculoskeletal Rehab Program at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, Canada's largest provider of adult rehabilitation services. "Generally, men reach their peak bone mass between the age of 30 and 35, while women reach their peak between 25 and 30."

Significant bone loss can lead to osteoporosis, a condition that occurs when bones become brittle, decreasing their density and strength, therefore increasing the risk of fractures.

Calcium plays an important role in decreasing the risk of osteoporosis.

"Our body carefully regulates our calcium levels to ensure that they stay within optimum range," explains Dr. Flannery. "When the level is above that range, the additional calcium is stored in our bones; similarly, when levels are low, calcium is removed from bone, decreasing their density."

The good news is that it is easy to maintain mass by eating calcium rich foods and getting regular physical activity. Vitamin D is also crucial in helping the human body absorb calcium.

"Exercise, especially weight bearing activity, places an increased force on our bones," explains Dr. Flannery. "Our bones respond by increasing in mass so that the load can be spread out over a larger amount of bone."

Weight bearing exercise is an activity where the entire weight of the body is supported by the legs, such as walking.

The best way to find out how healthy your bones are is through a bone mineral density test; a simple, painless, non-invasive diagnostic test that measures the amount of calcium and other minerals in your bones.

- News Canada