Healthy Bones For Life

(NAPSA)—When it comes to good health, you can certainly feel it in your bones. That's because your bones are alive. Every day, the body breaks down old bone and puts new bone in its place. While it is normal to lose some bone with age, too much bone loss can lead to osteoporosis.

What Is Osteoporosis?

With osteoporosis, the bones become weak and are more likely to break, especially those in the wrist, spine and hip.

Because bone loss often happens over time and doesn't hurt, many people have weak bones and don't even know it. A broken bone is often the first sign of osteoporosis. It's a good idea, therefore, to know the risk factors. These include:

•**Poor Diet.** Too little calcium can increase your chances of getting osteoporosis. Not enough vitamin D can also increase your risk. Vitamin D helps the body use the calcium in your diet.

•**Not Enough Physical Activity.** Not exercising and not being active for a long time can increase your chances of getting osteoporosis. Like muscles, bones become stronger—and stay stronger—with regular exercise.

•**Body Weight.** Being too thin makes you more likely to get osteoporosis.

•**Smoking.** Cigarettes can keep your body from using the calcium in your diet.

•**Alcohol.** People who drink a lot are more likely to get osteoporosis.

•**Medicines.** Certain medications can cause bone loss.

•**Age.** Your chances of getting osteoporosis increase as you get older.

•**Gender.** Women have a greater chance of getting osteoporosis because they have smaller bones than men and lose bone faster than men do. However, men

To keep bones healthy and strong, it helps to eat foods rich in calcium and vitamin D, and get plenty of exercise.

can still develop osteoporosis as they age.

•**Ethnicity.** White and Asian women are most likely to get osteoporosis. However, people of all backgrounds are at risk.

•**Family History.** Having a close relative with osteoporosis may increase your risk.

What To Do About It

Since osteoporosis has no symptoms, it's important to talk to your doctor about your bone health. If your doctor feels you're at risk, he or she may order a bone density test. It's quick, safe and painless.

If your bone density test shows that your bones are weak, your doctor may suggest lifestyle changes and prescribe medication that can help.

Learn More

For further information on osteoporosis and bone health, you can go to www.niams.nih.gov/multicultural, the website of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), or call toll free (877) 226-4267 and order a free publication on bone health, available in English or in Spanish.