



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Maintaining Strong Bones

(NAPSA)—Since the controversy over the negative effects of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) first ignited, physicians and women everywhere are left with unanswered questions. Perhaps the most pressing inquiry: “What should women do now?”

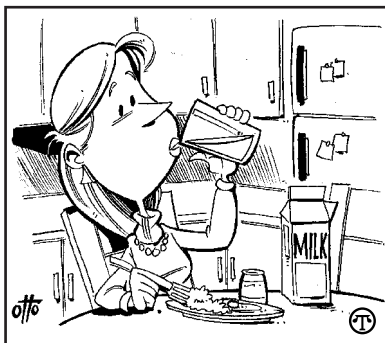
Due to negative studies, many women have stopped taking hormones, potentially leaving them at increased risk for chronic conditions like osteoporosis—the very ailment that prompted thousands of women to take hormones in the first place.

It's estimated that one-third of postmenopausal women in the United States use HRT to treat symptoms of menopause and prevent osteoporosis. After menopause, bone loss is accelerated due to hormone changes, and women need to be particularly attentive to bone health.

In lieu of HRT, there are a number of conflicting suggestions for alternative methods to prevent osteoporosis, but there is one avenue that is not controversial: going back to the basics of a balanced diet and active lifestyle.

“Women need to take their bone health into their own hands,” said Bess Dawson-Hughes, M.D., professor and researcher at Tufts University School of Medicine. “A healthy diet combined with regular physical activity can help women protect their bones, particularly now while women are questioning the best move to support their health.”

Dawson-Hughes, whose research focuses on environmental and genetic factors in bone health and fractures, says that although some women coming off HRT may still require prescription medication to preserve bone mass, the following guidelines will help many women achieve or maintain maximum bone health:



Many women are delighted to discover a natural way to build up their bones.

- Eat a balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D. It is recommended to have three servings of dairy a day to significantly decrease risk of osteoporosis in women. Foods such as milk and yogurt are all excellent sources of calcium and milk also contains vitamin D. Other foods that contain moderate levels of calcium include broccoli, kale and almonds.

- Exercise with weight-bearing activities such as stair climbing, hiking, walking and jogging, which can strengthen bones and help maintain bone density. Consult a physician to determine a safe level of activity before starting a new exercise program.

- Avoid smoking and limit alcohol intake.

As women and physicians struggle to figure out what to do regarding HRT, these immediate-action steps ensure a woman's bone health is being addressed.

For more information about preventing osteoporosis, visit www.mealsmatter.org. Visitors will find additional recommendations for maintaining bone health, bone-friendly meal plans and recipes, and a calcium quiz to help women determine if their calcium intake is adequate.