

## Children and Teens: Checklist for Strong Bones

During childhood and the teen years, human body builds bone faster than at any other time in life. Bones reach their maximum strength or density (peak bone mass) by age 25. Children and teens with dense, strong bones are less likely to have stress fractures. Stress fractures are tiny cracks in bones that can interfere with daily activities and sideline athletes. Attaining a higher peak bone mass also decrease the risk of getting osteoporosis later in life. Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to get thin, weak and more likely to break.

You can use the following checklist to find out if your child/teen is following the actions to build strong bones for life.

### **Your child/teen...**

**1. Eats a variety of foods that provide recommended amounts of calcium, protein and other nutrients?**

Ideally, half of a child/teen's plate must be filled with colorful fruits and vegetables. The other half should be a combination of whole grains and lean proteins such as chicken, fish, eggs, beans, and legumes.

**2. Chooses bone healthy beverages?**

It is important to drink beverages rich in calcium at each meal, such as low-fat milk and non-dairy beverages with added calcium such as orange juice and almond/coconut/soy beverages. Limit the intake of low calcium beverages such as sodas, sports drinks and coffee.

**3. Gets the recommended amount of calcium each day from food?**

One easy way to help your child get recommended amount of calcium is by including a calcium-rich food at each meal or snack. These foods include low-fat dairy foods, dark green leafy vegetables, canned fish and calcium-fortified beverages.

**4. Gets the recommended amount of Vitamin D each day?**

Foods that naturally contain vitamin D include fish such as salmon, sardines and tuna, milk and yogurts. Non-dairy beverages with added Vitamin D like fruit and vegetable juices are also readily available.

#### **5. Participates in regular physical activity?**

At least 60 minutes of physical activity per day is recommended for children and teens to build strong bones, maintain healthy weight and metabolism. Regular physical activity also improves focus and learning among children and teens. All children and teens must use appropriate protective equipment when biking, skating and participating in sports.

#### **6. Is exposed to second hand smoke?**

Exposure to second hand smoke and/or smoking in youth can seriously affect bone metabolism and prevent a child/teen from reaching their peak bone mass.

#### **7. Needs help for an eating disorder?**

When eating disorders occur during youth, bones may not grow to be as dense and strong as they should. There is a greater risk of fractures, bone loss and osteoporosis when eating disorders occur earlier in life and last longer. Timely recognition, diagnosis, and treatment of an eating disorder are crucial to protect your child's bones and overall health. If you are concerned, it is important to speak with child/teen's healthcare provider. For more information, contact The National Eating Disorders Association Helpline at 800-931-2237. It is also important to discuss your child's growth chart at each healthy visit with the pediatrician.