

4 Ways TO BUILD STRONG BONES

Theoretically, women should get all the nutrients they need to build and maintain strong bones from their diet, but for myriad reasons, not many do. A spate of new research suggests that most premenopausal women need supplements to ward off osteoporosis later in life. A study from the University of Michigan School of Nursing found that the gradual reduction of estrogen levels that precedes menopause can impair vitamin K's role in binding calcium to bone. The authors say the current recommended daily intake (RDI) of 1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}/\text{d}$ —the amount deemed necessary to ensure proper blood clotting—may not be enough for perimenopausal women, but establishing an optimum RDI awaits further research.

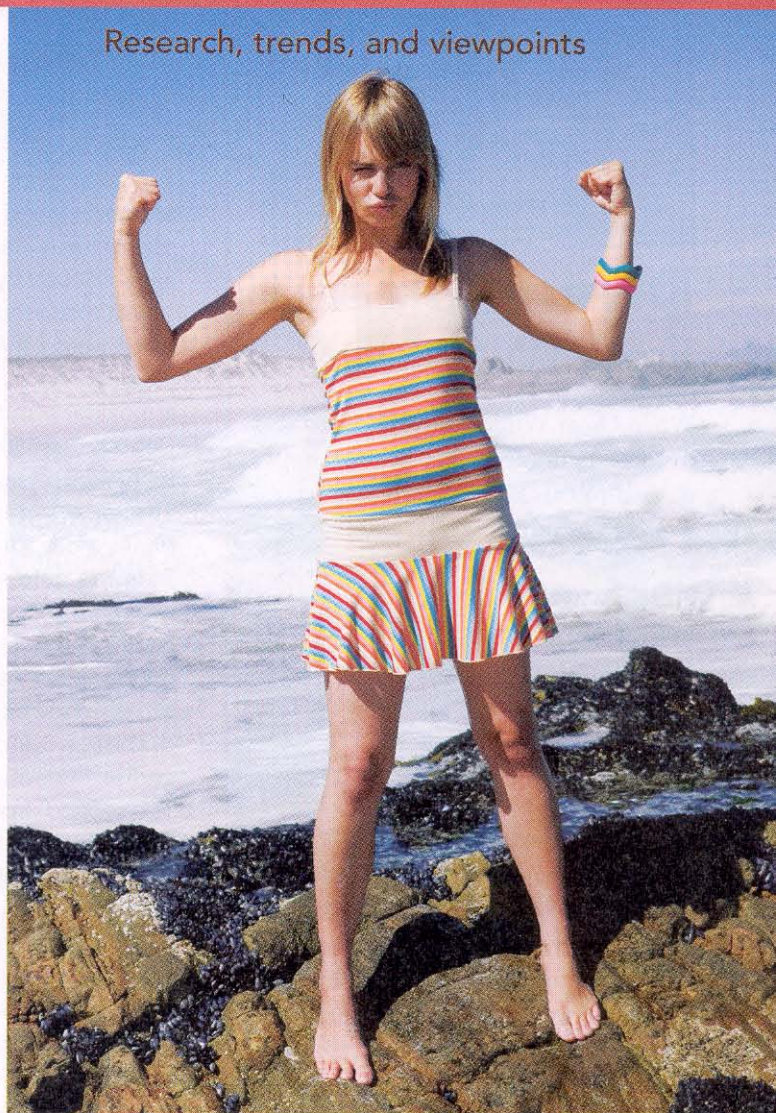
Women also lose bone mass and density because of the high acidity of the typical Western diet. This forces the body to use dietary minerals—and, in their absence, minerals in the bones—to balance the body's pH level, an equilibrium that's critical for survival. While dietary changes can reverse this acidosis, new research from Switzerland shows that taking a daily supplement of potassium citrate can improve the bones in postmenopausal women with low bone mass. The women who received the supplement had a significant increase in bone mass density in their lumbar spine and hips compared with women who received potassium chloride supplements. The difference indicates that the alkaline nature of the potas-

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sium citrate supplement improves bone health independent of the bone-building effects of potassium alone.

Chronic inflammation, another by-product of our Western diet, weakens bones by forcing the body's osteoclasts, the cells that degrade and reabsorb bone, into overdrive. This accelerates the loss of minerals the body socked away during its youth. In a

Research, trends, and viewpoints



study on mice, researchers at the University of Texas in San Antonio found that supplementing with conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) put the brakes on the osteoclasts and slowed down the loss of bone (and muscle) mass. CLA, a compound formed from plant fatty acids, occurs naturally in dairy products and meat.

Dietary changes can prove difficult to make—just ask anyone trying to lose weight—but women who are concerned about osteoporosis can take a simple step toward bone health: Stop drinking colas. It doesn't seem to matter if the sodas are diet, regular, or decaffeinated, says a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Women 60 or older who drink cola had lower bone mass than those who didn't, and the loss became greater with each additional can. Still need that carbonated pick-me-up? Noncola soft drinks appear to be bone-friendly. —James Keough

“Illness and suffering are caused by imbalance and disharmony, in whatever areas of our life they may occur.”—ALFRED VOGEL, NATURAL HEALTH PIONEER (1902–1996)