

Patient information

Healthy bones for children

Advice on promoting good bone health for children and young people.

A healthy diet = strong bones

Most people should be able to get all the nutrients they need for healthy bones by eating a healthy balanced diet.

A healthy balanced diet will help you build strong bones from an early age and maintain them throughout your life.

Poor bone health can cause conditions such as rickets and osteoporosis and increase the risk of breaking a bone from a fall later in life.

Many nutrients contribute to bone health, not just calcium and vitamin D. The best advice for bone health is to eat a healthy balanced diet with plenty of variety.

You need sufficient calcium to strengthen your bones and vitamin D to help your body absorb calcium.

A good diet is only one of the building blocks for healthy bones, which also includes physical activity and avoiding certain risk factors.

Eat well, eat healthy and exercise!

Calcium for healthy bones

Calcium is important throughout all stages of childhood, playing a big role in making strong bones, but did you know that it is particularly vital during puberty when the bones grow quicker than at any other time? Puberty takes place over a number of years, typically sometime between 11 to 15 for girls and 12 to 16 for boys.

People do not think about bone health in teenagers

as they do with toddlers, but they are growing and changing at a fast rate, so need lots more calcium to help strengthen their bones.

Foods that contain lots of calcium include dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yoghurt, and also tinned sardines (with the bones in), green leafy vegetables (but not spinach), peas, dried figs, nuts, seeds and anything that's fortified with calcium, including some soya milks.

Vitamin D for kids bone health

Vitamin D is important for bones because it helps our bodies to absorb calcium.

Our **main source** of vitamin D is sunlight. Vitamin D is made by our skin when it's exposed to sunlight during the summer months (late March/April to the end of September).

There are only **a few foods** that are a good source of vitamin D, these include oily fish, eggs and foods that have been fortified with vitamin D, such as fat spreads, yoghurts and some breakfast cereals.

To ensure they get enough vitamin D, the following groups should take **daily vitamin D supplements**:

- all babies from birth to one year of age (including breast-fed babies and formula-fed babies who have less than 500ml a day of infant formula)
- all children aged one to five years old

Everyone over the age of five years is advised to consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D. Most people aged five years and above will probably get enough vitamin D from sunlight in the summer (late March/early April to the end of September), so you might choose not to take a vitamin D supplement during these months.

It's important never to let your child's skin go red or start to burn when in the sun. Babies under six months should never go in direct sunlight.

If you receive benefits, you may be eligible for free 'Healthy Start' vitamins, which contain vitamin D. Your health visitor can tell you more, or you can visit the Healthy Start website.

Vitamin K for healthy bones

Vitamin K is thought to stimulate bone formation. It is found most abundantly in dark leafy greens like kale and spinach, but is also readily available in beans, soy products and some fruits and vegetables.

Vegans

Non-vegans get most of their calcium from dairy foods (milk, cheese and yoghurt), but vegans can also get it from other foods. Good sources of calcium for vegans include:

- fortified soya, rice and oat drinks
- calcium-set tofu
- sesame seeds and tahini
- pulses
- brown and white bread (in the UK calcium is added to white and brown flour by law)
- dried fruit such as raisins, prunes, figs and dried apricots

The vegan diet contains little if any vitamin D without fortified foods or supplements added to the diet. Try to get sufficient sunlight exposure during the UK summer.

Vegan sources of vitamin D are:

- exposure to summer sunshine – remember to cover up or protect your skin before it starts to turn red or burn.
- fortified fat spreads, breakfast cereals and soya drinks (with vitamin D added)
- vitamin D supplements

Exercise

Exercise gives bones a reason to live. When bones are put to work, especially in weight-bearing activities such as running, football, basketball, and weightlifting, they respond by becoming stronger and denser. Taking part in physical activity may be the best thing your child can do to promote adolescent bone health.

It has been proven that teenagers that are not active have a lower bone density by age 18 than those teens that take part in regular physical activity.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)
<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>

