

Rheumatoid Arthritis and Bone Health

Protecting Bone Health

Bone health is an important part of your general health. When the structure of bone becomes weaker and less dense there is an increased risk of breaking. This is osteoporosis. It can lead to a higher risk of a bone breaking from a minor incident (such as a bump, fall or trip). Early diagnosis and management of osteoporosis can help protect bone health and reduce the risk of breaking a bone.

Rheumatoid Arthritis and Bone Health

Rheumatoid arthritis is a particular form of arthritis. It is an auto-immune condition that causes pain, swelling and stiffness of the joints. There are several reasons why people who have rheumatoid arthritis are at higher risk of developing osteoporosis.

Inflammation is part of our natural response to germs or harmful substances. In normal circumstances the heat and redness of inflammation is visible proof that the immune system is working hard to protect the body. In rheumatoid arthritis the immune system can turn on the body to attack its own healthy joints. The joints become inflamed, and the resulting damage can trigger further inflammation and damage. Rheumatoid arthritis which is not controlled may have an impact on other areas of the body, particularly the bones. Bone surrounding arthritic joints may be weakened by the inflammation occurring nearby. This damage can often be seen on X-rays.

Natural chemicals released by the body from inflamed joints can circulate around the body, weakening other parts of the skeleton and increasing the risk of osteoporosis.

Joint inflammation can cause pain and difficulty moving. It is understandable that having painful and stiff joints can make it difficult to stay active. However bones need the 'stress' of regular exercise to stay strong and healthy. Over time a lack of physical activity may cause your bones to become weaker, increasing the risk of osteoporosis.

Steroid medications (also called glucocorticoids or corticosteroids) are commonly prescribed for rheumatoid arthritis. They are very effective at reducing pain and swelling in the joints. However, it is also well known that steroid medications taken over a long period can lead to bone weakness and increase the risk of osteoporosis.

Investigating Bone Health

For these reasons people living with rheumatoid arthritis should have their bone health investigated and regularly monitored. Your doctor may refer you for a bone density scan. This is because undiagnosed osteoporosis can lead to broken bones. If required osteoporosis medication may be prescribed to help manage and protect your bone health.

Rheumatoid Arthritis and Bone Health cont.

Other Common Risk Factors

Review other common risk factors for osteoporosis. If any risk factors apply to you – discuss these with your doctor.

Personal History	Medical Conditions	Medications
Previous fracture (from minor bump or fall)	Coeliac disease	Certain treatment for breast cancer
Family history of osteoporosis (parent/sibling)	Overactive thyroid or parathyroid	Certain treatment for prostate cancer
Loss of height (3 cm or more)	Diabetes	Glucocorticoids (steroids)
Smoking/Excessive alcohol	Early menopause/Low testosterone	Anti-epilepsy treatment
Inadequate calcium, vitamin D or lack of exercise	Chronic kidney disease or liver disease	
Age 70 years and over		

Calcium. Vitamin D. Exercise

Take simple steps to help support your bone health.

Focus On	Recommended
Calcium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,000 mg per day from the diet • Increasing to 1,300 mg for women over 50 years and men over 70 years • If dietary intake is low a supplement may be required
Vitamin D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited sun exposure – in summer a few minutes per day, in winter slightly longer • Avoid UV index above 3 • If vitamin D deficiency is confirmed by your doctor a supplement may be required
Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific mix of weight bearing, resistance training and balance exercises

For more information about rheumatoid arthritis please visit **Arthritis Australia** www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

For more information



Call our national toll-free number

1800 242 141



Visit our website

healthybonesaustralia.org.au



Talk to your doctor

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