Bone Health

Contributed by North Valley Physical Therapy

Bone changes! It is obvious when children grow, and obvious when you see the new bone at a fracture site on an x-ray. It is also obvious something has changed when you see an older person who is quite stooped over. What is not obvious is the process. Since bone grows slowly, we don’t immediately see small changes. It’s less noticeable than the growth of our hair and fingernails.

Our body is continually making new bone and absorbing old bone. When we are younger, the process favors bone development and density increases, with peak bone mass occurring between age 25 and 35. The process slowly changes after 35 when more bone is typically lost than made. The rate of bone loss increases rapidly at menopause. In fact, up to 20% of a woman’s lifetime bone loss can occur in the first five to seven years after menopause.

Due to bone growth and loss happening gradually over time, so few women are aware of it happening. Therefore, Osteoporosis, which is the loss of bone density, is considered a “silent disease.” For some women, a bone scan completed during menopause on a screening basis, is their first recognition of poor bone health. The scan is usually measured with a specific test called a dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA). For others, they discover the underlying problem when they have a fracture.

Some signs of Osteoporosis include low back and/or neck pain, fractures with little cause and loss of height. However, proper attention to exercise, nutrition and in some cases, medications to modify bone loss or help with bone growth, can lead to a change in the right direction!

Offering women the opportunity to learn more about how to take care of themselves is empowering. Personalizing an exercise plan is essential because bone loss can slow down with proper exercise. This includes weight-bearing exercises such as walking and jogging. It also includes resistance exercises such as free weights and stretch bands. Not to mention, exercise could associate postural change with older age (the stooped, forward bent spine) as a reality of the past.

Falling is a scary thing to do when you have Osteoporosis. Falls can create fractures that are not only painful, but may require you to stay off your feet furthering your inability to strengthen. Therefore, it is important for women to include postural and balance exercises in their daily routine such as tai chi and yoga.

Start the message young. Good nutrition, especially calcium and vitamin D, is important for bone production. Children and teens need exercise, particularly jumping and running, active games and sports. These transmit forces through the muscles and bones that help stimulate bone growth and strength.

North Valley Physical Therapy offers a wide variety of women’s health and functional orthopedic exercise programs. For a complete list of therapy options, visit www.nvhos.org/nvh/NVHPT-ColumbiaFalls or call 892-2777.