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Ask a Yoga Therapist

Yoga & Bone Health?



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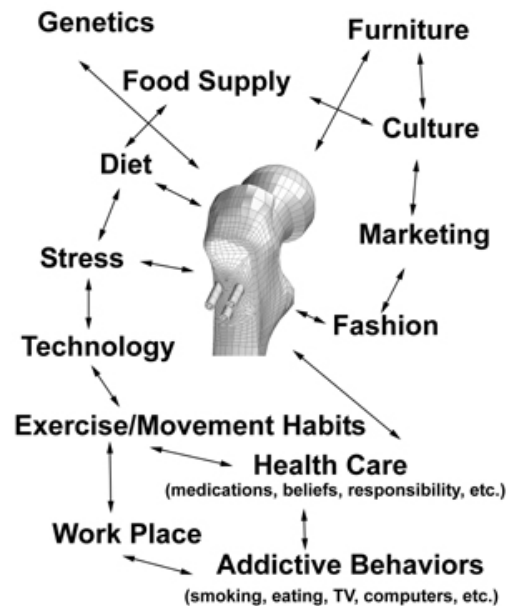
Ask the Yoga Therapist

This column is part of a new, ongoing column where you can submit your or your students' questions about yoga challenges and related health and safety concerns. Submit your questions to askatherapist@yogatherapy.com

Q: How can Yoga therapy contribute to better bone health, even for someone with osteoporosis?

A: As Yoga practitioners we should know that for every female student over 50 years, 1 in every 2 has low bone density and is at risk for fracture. This fact, coupled with last quarter's article on balance builds on the important role Yoga can play in maintaining skeletal health throughout the life spectrum.

Osteoporosis is the gradual and silent loss of bone. It is *not* a normal aging process, and as a systemic skeletal disease it is characterized by low bone mass and microarchitectural deterioration of bone tissue, with a consequent increase in bone fragility and susceptibility to fracture. Bone mineral density (BMD) is the amount of bone tissue in a measured volume of space. Many factors affect both the amount of bone and how it is built (see illustration). Yoga can address many of these and I will touch on two of the most powerful applications.



Consider that some people with average bone density suffer osteoporotic fractures while a few people with low density never experience a fracture. The best analogy for understanding this dilemma is to recall the high school physics contest where students use a fixed amount of material (Popsicle sticks rather than bone) and have to construct a bridge. Some bridges collapse easily, while others containing the same mass (same number of sticks) can hold great amounts of weight. This design factor from a yogic perspective is key to the power of proper alignment and movement in *âsana* practice. Paying close attention to the forces that are applied both in dynamic loads (walking, running or jumping) and static loads (standing, sitting and lying down) is important because those loads generate electrical fields that are a form of information to direct the microarchitecture. Poor alignment/recruitment forces = faulty construction or a weak bridges. Proper alignment = well constructed bone able to effectively transmit forces.

Keep in mind proper breathing helps to sustain this alignment off-the-mat. The breath as the pulse of the mind and reflection of the soul is not only regulated in the practice of pranayama, but is an artifact of the Yoga student's work in the Yamas and Niyamas. Imbalance there yields a faulty breathing pattern which misdirects forces in the physical body. Key to the person (men get osteoporosis too, just later generally) is the fear of fracture and postural deformity. While caution is justified, the spiritual inquiry into the deeper levels of perception behind these fears makes for a powerful Yoga practice. Who am I?

What am I? Yoga Sutra II.4 Avidyâ ksetram uttaresâm prasupta tanu vicchinno 'dârânâm(Ignorance is the cause of all the other sources of psychic distress, whether dormant, weak or spread out.)

As the illustration depicts, there are many more factors Yoga can address regarding bone health. For more information on Yoga therapy and bone health, you can access my article in the International Association of Yoga Therapy Journal at <http://matthewjtaylor.com/osteoporosis.pdf>. I will also be presenting on “Yoga for Bone Health” and “Yoga & Chronic Pain” at this spring’s www.scottsdaleyogafestival.com. Hope to see you there!

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