

Strong BONES and Juicy JOINTS



Yes, dem bones are all connected to one another, as the song goes. What's more, bone health is essential to overall health and fitness: It's impossible to be fit and strong without an equally fit and strong skeleton. Juicy joints help too, as **Verne Maree** discovers.

My own bones and joints have given me a bit of grief over the past few years. I've had tennis elbow (tendinitis) on both sides at different times, and also a frozen shoulder – both conditions that are poorly understood and can linger for a frustratingly indeterminate length of time.

Notably, both problems affect my arms, which get little use compared to these runner's legs. Despite 25 years of pounding the pavement, my hips, knees and ankles have so far been generally trouble-free. (Touch wood.)

Happily, there's no evidence that running causes joint problems such as osteoarthritis of the knee in later life. In fact, new studies indicate that not only is there no connection between running and arthritis, but running may even help protect you from joint problems. And, if only to show that you can successfully Google support for just about any hypothesis, one American study showed absolutely no difference between the knee health of those who averaged 200 miles a year and those who averaged 2,000 miles a year.

So I strongly suspect that a lack of upper-body weight training – oh, how I hate gyms! – may be at least a contributory factor to my elbow woes. According to physiotherapist Dr Simon Raftery of Orthomed, it's now clear that elbow tendinitis in women over 45 is more likely to be caused by age-related degeneration of the tendon than it is to inflammation caused by overuse; and that indicates a need to strengthen the arm muscles, ligaments and tendons. (Not, one presumes, by taking up the sport of tennis.)

While appropriate rest can be helpful, even essential, sitting and waiting for the pain to go away is not a sensible option. Use it or lose it, as they say.



#1 Makes You Stronger

AUDREY D'COTTA, studio director of **The Moving Body**, heads up a large team of specialists in various complementary fields – from Pilates, CoreAlign and Gyrotonic to physiotherapy, massage and more. Who better to address the whys and hows of achieving a stronger frame?

What's so important about having strong bones and joints?

Together, and in conjunction with healthy musculature, bones provide the support and mobility that our bodies need to carry out our daily functions and move us through various activities. Keeping up skeletal strength and bone health is an important strategy for remaining active and injury-free for as long as we can.

At what age do we need to start paying attention to bone health?

From very young. Our bodies build the greatest amount of bone from childhood until we attain peak bone mass somewhere between the ages of 18 and 25. So, it's vital for children and teens to eat well and stay active – and important that we work to maintain the bone mass we have as young adults to help support us through our later years. For this purpose, both weight-bearing and resistance exercises are vital.

No one wants their new strengthening regime to be scuppered by injury, though. Our excellent team of physiotherapists and instructors are able to assess your current needs and abilities in order to customise a safe and effective exercise programme for strengthening the body, establishing efficient movement patterns, and aligning the joints and the skeleton.

What kind of weight-bearing exercise do you recommend?

Weight-bearing exercise can be defined as moving against gravity while in an upright position. At The Moving Body, we offer a functional training programme on an apparatus called the **CoreAlign**, designed to improve posture, balance and functional movement. It consists of two tracks that allow the legs to work independently of each other. A ladder at the front of the tracks helps with balance, and there's a support for performing stretches, making this an extremely safe environment for anyone who feels they may be at risk of falling.

How would you define resistance exercise?

Resistance exercise is any exercise that forces the skeletal muscles to contract. It involves the muscles pulling on the bone to create tension, which also fortifies the bone. The resistance can come from weights, elastic bands or springs, for example. But you can also consider your own body weight as resistance in some movements, for instance a push-up.

The Moving Body also offers low-impact forms of resistance exercise via **Pilates** and **Gyrotonic**. Both of these programmes emphasise good posture, alignment and balance as well as full-body integrated movements.

Importantly, each of these two programmes helps establish good form for weight training, so that the forces are ideally transmitted through a well-aligned spine and hips.

#2 Makes You Pain-free

According to DR WILLIAM CHOI of the **Academy of Chiropractic Clinic**, who practises the Gonstead Method, back pain is one of the most common medical problems nowadays. The good news? There's much we can do to prevent spinal diseases and keep ourselves pain-free.

What can we do to avoid back problems?

Stay fit and keep active, for one, as part of a healthy lifestyle designed to prevent overweight and obesity. Obesity – especially a big belly – puts stress on the spine. To make things worse, weak back and abdominal muscles are unable to support the spine properly.

Ageing plays a role, of course, and we do tend to experience more back problems as we grow older. However, studies show that the less physically fit tend to be more susceptible to back pain at any age. That is not to say you should go out and exercise strenuously, especially if you've been sedentary for a while. To prevent exercise-related injury, it's important to ease yourself gently into exercise; I advocate moderate exercise done on a daily basis.

And, of course, don't smoke tobacco. Smoking increases the risk of both low back pain and sciatica. What's more, it slows down the pace of healing, because it blocks the delivery of nutrients to the spinal discs.

Can back problems be hereditary?

Yes, to a point: if a relative suffers from illnesses such as ankylosing spondylitis (a form of arthritis that affects the spine), there's a chance you might too. Race also plays a role. African women are two to three times more likely to develop spinal problems than white women are.

What tends to go wrong with the spine?

Damage that prevents the spinal cord from sending messages to the brain can affect the body in several ways. It might cause a low heart rate or low blood pressure, difficulty in swallowing, an inability to regulate

body temperature, a weakening of the muscles used for breathing and coughing, or a loss of bowel and bladder control.



The vertebral nerves are divided into four sections:

- cervical (C1 to C8), which affect leg and hand movement;
- thoracic (T1 to T12), which affect the chest, mid-back and abdomen;
- lumbar (L1 to L5) and
- sacral (S1 to S5), which both affect the hips and legs, and control of the bowel and bladder.

How does the Gonstead Method work to correct these abnormalities?

The Gonstead Method focuses on specific and accurate spinal adjustments, made only to the problematic areas. Your Gonstead doctor's goal is to help you restore and maintain optimal health, by providing you with the most precise and painless adjustments. Through this, it will help you to achieve a biomechanically correct position.



#3 Makes Old Bones

To make old bones, says DR DAVID TIO of the Osteopathic Treatment Centre, we need to avoid osteoporosis – the silent and deadly disease that thins and weakens the bones of increasing numbers of men and women in middle and old age. It is silent: most sufferers don't know they have it until they experience a fracture. And it can be deadly: studies show that one out of three people who suffer an osteoporosis-related hip fracture will die within a year.

An inactive lifestyle, not enough exposure to sunlight, drinking too much, smoking, crash-dieting, stress, insufficient sleep and more are all lifestyle factors that contribute to osteoporosis.

The worst culprit, says Dr Tio, is the excessive consumption of carbonated drinks and sugary food, along with too much protein such as meat and dairy products. That's because meat and dairy all contain high levels of phosphorous, which leaches calcium from our bones.

Better news is that seeds (especially sesame), nuts and seaweed deliver hugely more calcium than dairy does, and they also provide the many other

minerals we need to build strong bones.

David heads up an international team of osteopaths who will advise on lifestyle changes that you can make to avoid getting osteoporosis, or if you already have it, to prevent it from getting worse. They're also qualified to prescribe bone-strengthening nutritional supplements.

In case you're wondering what osteopathy has to do with nutrition – after all, isn't osteopathy a form of manipulation or manual therapy? – Dr David Tio has been interested in natural health throughout his long and incredibly varied career, and the way he practises osteopathy promotes an integrated, holistic approach to healing.

Scoliosis – an abnormal sideways curvature of the spine – is just one of many medical conditions that Dr Tio has successfully treated through osteopathy, avoiding any need to wear a medical body brace or, the final invasive resort, inserting a metal rod into the spine. Though early intervention is preferable, good results may be achieved even in adulthood, he confirms.

What's more, he has also established a Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, which offers

everything from acupuncture and applied kinesiology to chiropody and podiatry, psychotherapy and counselling, remedial and sports therapy, therapeutic massage, naturopathy, hypnotherapy, rolfing, neurofeedback and physiotherapy. In essence, having and maintaining a strong skeleton is inextricably associated with overall health – you can't have one without the other.

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