

Focus on Bone Health

Did you play hop scotch or jump rope when you were a child? It turns out these might be even better for your health as an adult than they were when you were young.

Bone is living tissue, just like muscle, and key bone-building years for your body are those when your skeleton is growing — typically through your mid-20s. This is a critical period for bone health because what is built during these years will need to last a lifetime. After age 35, you gradually lose bone as a part of the natural aging process.

Regular physical activity will help keep bones strong and slow the rate of bone loss, even if you have fragile bones or osteoporosis. By leading an active lifestyle, you can significantly decrease your risk of falling and breaking a bone.

What type of exercise is good for your bones? The weight-bearing kind, which is anything that forces you to work against gravity. This type of exercise is effective because as you put more tension on your muscles it also puts more pressure or “stress” on your bones. Your body responds by creating fresh, new bone and greater bone strength. Weight-bearing exercise is anything that involves an impact with the earth and requires your feet and legs to support you. Some examples include brisk walking, hiking, jogging, marching, climbing stairs, weight training, dancing, yoga, and tennis. Gardening can be weight bearing if you carry a water can, walk in your yard, etc.

There is another type of weight-bearing activity that could be better for your bones than the exercises mentioned above — jumping and hopping.

A recent study, reported in the American Journal of Health Promotion, reveals that jumping 10 times/twice a day provides greater bone-building benefits than running or jogging. This is not recommended for anyone who has osteoporosis, but for those who want to be proactive with exercise, this is great news.

Even if you walk briskly or jog most days of the week, you will get greater bone-health benefit if you also hop or leap every day to jar your bones a little and send a message that they need to get stronger. If hopping is too difficult, start with marching or doing heel drops. Remember that your goal is to create impact with the ground or floor to jar your bones just a bit.

First, warm up your muscles by walking for a minute or marching in place. Marching with impact: This movement is basic marching in place where you push, or stomp, your feet on the ground for impact. Heel Drop: Hold onto

something, at the proper height, for stability (back of a chair or countertop, for example). Rise up on your toes, then drop your heels down abruptly. Power Hop: You can hop on both legs, or for maximum benefit hop on one leg. If necessary, hold onto something for stability. Bend your knees for cushion when you land. Never land on straight knees. You can do the hops quickly or rest for up to a half minute between hops.