Commentary

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The Role of Nutrition in Maintaining Optimal Bone Health

John Adam*

Department of Hematology, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, USA

***Corresponding author:** John Adam, Department of Hematology, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, USA; E-mail: Adam_J@led.US

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Description

Bone health refers to the overall well-being and strength of the skeletal system. It involves maintaining the integrity, density, and structure of bones to support their functions, such as providing support for the body, protecting vital organs, facilitating movement, and storing minerals like calcium and phosphorus. Maintaining good bone health is crucial throughout a person's life, as bones continuously undergo a process called remodeling, where old bone tissue is broken down by specialized cells called osteoclasts and new bone tissue is formed by osteoblasts. An imbalance in this process can lead to various bone disorders, such as osteoporosis, osteopenia, and brittle bones.

Adequate calcium and vitamin D intake: Calcium is a key mineral for bone strength, and vitamin D helps in its absorption. Consuming calcium-rich foods (dairy products, leafy greens, etc.) and getting enough sunlight for vitamin D synthesis are important. A nutritious diet that includes a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats provides essential nutrients for bone health, including vitamins (such as vitamin K) and minerals (like magnesium). Weight-bearing exercises (walking, jogging, weight lifting) and muscle-strengthening activities help stimulate bone formation, improve bone density, and enhance overall bone health.

Avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol: Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can negatively impact bone health and increase the risk of fractures and osteoporosis. Taking precautions to prevent falls, such as removing tripping hazards and using assistive devices if needed, can reduce the risk of fractures, especially in older individuals. Periodic bone density tests, such as Dual-Energy X-Ray Absorptiometry (DXA) scans, can help assess bone density and identify potential concerns for early intervention. By adopting a healthy lifestyle, including a balanced diet, regular exercise, and preventive measures, individuals can promote and maintain optimal bone health throughout their lives. It is also important to consult healthcare professionals for personalized advice and guidance on maintaining and improving bone health.

The endocrine system is highly susceptible to damage by high-dose chemotherapy and/or irradiation before Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation (HCT) during childhood. The specific endocrine organs most affected by HCT include the thyroid gland, the pituitary, and the gonads. In addition, hormones that support development and stability of the skeletal system are also affected. Insufficiency of thyroid hormone is 1 of the most common late sequelae of HCT, and occurs more often in young children. Deficiency in the pituitary's production of growth hormone is a problem of unique concern to the pediatric population. The reproductive risks of HCT depend on the patient's gender and pubertal status at the time of HCT. Pubertal or gonadal failure frequently occurs, especially in females. Infertility risks for both genders remain high, whereas methods of fertility preservation are limited in all but post-pubertal males. Bone health post-HCT can be compromised by low bone mineral density as well as avascular necrosis, but the data on both problems in the pediatric HCT population are limited. In this paper, the current state of knowledge, gaps in that knowledge, and recommendations for future research are addressed in detail for each of these systems.

Bones are complex structures that provide support, protection, and mobility to the body. They are composed of several components that contribute to their unique structure and function: Also known as cortical bone, compact bone is the dense outer layer of bone tissue. It appears solid and smooth to the naked eye. It provides strength and stability to the bone. Also called cancellous or trabecular bone, spongy bone is found inside the compact bone and forms a network of interconnected struts or trabeculae. It has a porous, honeycomb-like structure, which makes it lightweight and helps to reduce the overall weight of the skeleton. Spongy bone also contains bone marrow, where blood cells are produced. Bone marrow is a soft, gelatinous tissue found in the central cavities of certain bones, such as the long bones and the pelvic bones. It is responsible for producing red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. There are two types of bone marrow: Red marrow, which is involved in blood cell production, and yellow marrow, which consists mainly of fat cells. The periosteum is a thin, fibrous membrane that covers the outer surface of bones. It contains blood vessels, nerves, and cells involved in bone growth and repair. The periosteum also serves as an attachment point for tendons and ligaments. Bones are made up of different types of cells that perform specific functions. Osteoblasts are responsible for bone formation and synthesis of the bone matrix. Osteoclasts, on the other hand, are involved in bone resorption, breaking down and remodeling bone tissue. Osteocytes are mature bone cells that help maintain the bone tissue and play a role in mineral homeostasis.

The bone matrix is a rigid, mineralized substance that makes up the majority of bone tissue. It consists of organic components, primarily collagen fibers, which provide flexibility and strength, and inorganic components, mainly hydroxyapatite crystals composed of calcium and phosphate, which give bone its hardness and rigidity. The Haversian system, also known as an osteon, is the basic functional unit of compact bone. It consists of concentric layers of bone tissue called lamellae, surrounding a central canal called the Haversian canal. The Haversian canal contains blood vessels, nerves, and lymphatic vessels, which supply nutrients and remove waste products from the bone cells. The structure of bones is designed to withstand mechanical stress and provide support to the body while allowing for movement. The combination of compact and spongy bone, bone marrow, periosteum, specialized cells, and the bone matrix contributes to the overall strength, flexibility, and resilience of the skeletal system. Bone tumors can show a wide range of nonspecific rheumatic manifestations. The presence of unexplained or atypical chronic bone pain, an enlarging bone mass, neurovascular compression syndromes, or pathologic fractures should alert us to the possibility of a bone tumor causing these symptoms. These patients must undergo a complete physical examination; adequate imaging; and, if needed, a biopsy to confirm their diagnosis and offer them an opportune treatment.