A NOTE ON NUTRITION



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BEYOND MILK:
The new science of whole-body bone longevity

A quiet shift is happening in modern wellness: experts are ditching single-nutrient fixes in favour of holistic bone care. Combining local nutrition, resistance movement, and early-life habits is redefining how we age gracefully.



When we hear the words "strong bones", most of us immediately think of calcium. There is a problem with this line of thinking. Bone health is much more than calcium. It is a living tissue. Throughout our lives, old bone is continuously broken down, and new tissue is formed. This complex process depends not only on calcium, but also on vitamin D, protein, other micronutrients, physical activity, hormones, body weight and overall nutritional status.

Bangladesh receives abundant sunlight throughout much of the year. Yet, vitamin D deficiency and insufficiency remain surprisingly common. A recent laboratory-based study of adults in Bangladesh found that only 12.2 per cent of participants had sufficient vitamin D; 49.3 per cent were deficient, and another 38.5 per cent were insufficient. Women had a higher prevalence of deficiency than men.

Calcium remains a fundamental nutrient for bone health. However, the question should not simply be, "How much calcium am I taking?" The better question is, "Am I getting enough calcium from an overall balanced diet?"

Milk and yoghurt are familiar calcium sources. But Bangladesh has many other possibilities, such as small fish eaten with their edible bones, appropriate leafy vegetables, and calcium-fortified foods where available, and calcium-containing soy products.

The problem is that dietary calcium intake can be inadequate in some Bangladeshi populations. Research among premenopausal Bangladeshi women has demonstrated low calcium intake and suggested that inadequate intake may compromise bone accretion and increase future osteoporosis risk. This is why calcium supplements should not become a substitute for a nutritious diet.

Bone contains an organic matrix in which collagen and other proteins provide an important structural framework. Adequate protein is particularly important during childhood and adolescence, when peak bone mass is being developed, and later in life when muscle and bone loss become increasingly important.

Along with a nutritious diet. bones need mechanical stimulation. Weight-bearing and resistance exercises stimulate bone and muscle. Regular physical activity also improves strength and balance, which can help reduce the risk of falls.

For a healthy adult, brisk walking, stair climbing, resistance exercises, and appropriate sports can all contribute to a bone-friendly lifestyle.

For older adults, balance and strength exercises become particularly important. However, exercise should be individualised. Someone with osteoporosis, a previous fracture or significant musculoskeletal disease may need professional guidance before starting high-impact activity.

Osteoporosis is often regarded as an "old person's disease." This is misleading. Bone health is built across the life course. Childhood and adolescence are crucial periods for accumulating bone mass. Research among Bangladeshi women has shown that bone mineral density begins declining relatively early in adulthood and declines more rapidly with advancing age. This means that waiting until the age of 50 or 60 to think about bone health is too late. Healthy eating, adequate protein and calcium, appropriate vitamin D status, physical activity and maintaining a healthy body weight should begin much earlier. This is particularly important for girls and young women because inadequate nutrition during the years when peak bone mass is being established can have consequences decades later.

Women experience accelerated bone loss around menopause because the protective effect of estrogen decreases. Bangladesh-specific research highlights the concern. Women with low body weight, poor nutritional intake, limited physical activity, vitamin D deficiency, early menopause or other clinical risk factors may require additional assessment. And osteoporosis is not exclusively a women's disease. Men can also develop osteoporosis, particularly with ageing, chronic illness, nutritional deficiencies and certain medications.

So, what does a bone-friendly Bangladeshi diet look like? It does not have to be complicated or expensive.

Include a calcium source regularly: Milk, yoghurt, small fish with edible bones, suitable leafy vegetables and fortified foods can contribute calcium.

Eat adequate protein every day: Include fish, eggs, dairy, poultry, lean meat, dal, beans, soy, nuts and seeds according to individual needs.

Pay attention to vitamin D: Safe, appropriate sunlight exposure and vitamin-D-containing foods can contribute to maintaining vitamin D status. Individuals with deficiency may require supplementation under medical supervision.

Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits: A varied diet supplies magnesium, vitamin K, potassium and other micronutrients and bioactive compounds involved in overall musculoskeletal health.

Stay physically active: Combine weight-bearing activity with muscle-strengthening and balance exercises where appropriate.

Maintain a healthy body weight: Being underweight is associated with poorer bone health, while obesity can also create musculoskeletal and mobility problems.

Photo: Collected

ELEGANTLY INTELLIGENT



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Choosing life over broken marriages

As undesirable as it may be, sometimes divorce becomes an inevitability of life. In the pursuit of making marriages work, couples often suffer immensely. And when every effort falls short, love and respect are replaced with anger and resentment; the best course of action is to separate amiably. Women in 2026 are more well-informed, financially responsible, and capable of taking care of themselves in ways their previous generations were not. Hence, more and more women are choosing mental peace over conflict.

Amelia shares her experience beautifully. Hers was a happy marriage by most standards. As professionals, she and her husband built a life together for nearly two decades. She made their house a home by pouring her heart, soul, and finances. And when it fell apart because of infidelity, the consequences were too severe to bear.

"When you've lived with someone for thirteen years, you don't just develop a relationship with that person; you develop habits, routines and an entire ecosystem around the marriage," she shares. "And then when that ceases to exist, the void and the chasm initially seem impossible to grasp and fill," she said.

Amelia, while nursing a broken heart that sent her to hospital twice in the course of her divorce proceedings, picked herself up with boundless courage and determination.



"I threw myself into work and focused on my children because I did not want to wallow in my misery. After all, I had a thriving career, and I am financially stable enough to have my own home and provide for my children. So, I didn't have a lot to complain about, unlike a lot of other women in my position,' she remarks assertively.

It was not easy at first. With her husband no longer in the picture, she realised people around her changed a lot. Renting a house and employing new staff brought a lot of judgment, as our society is still largely patriarchal. Both her parents and good friends stood by her side. The idea of raising her children alone was daunting, but they were supportive of Amelia's decision to break free and helped her every step of the way in that journey.

"Emotionally, they (the children) were devastated as the life they knew no longer existed. Slowly they understood happy, separated couples are better than miserable parents who stay together," she states affirmatively.

To that end, Manzima shares her experience.

She shares with a sense of ease, "I came out of a difficult marriage, so even though this new life comes with its own struggles, it also comes with peace. I now have to manage everything on my own, from the children and finances to making every important decision. It can feel overwhelming, but I no longer live with the same emotional stress and uncertainty. Life is harder in many ways, but it is also calmer, safer and more honest."

"The greatest challenge is knowing that everything rests on me. I have to be emotionally available for my children, take care of their education and everyday needs, manage the household, and think of our financial security," she says with a sense of relief.

And that's the greatest takeaway.

Divorce is not desirable to anyone, but sometimes that's the only way, but it's definitely not the end. Women are stronger than they realise, and are capable of taking on the world. The road may be treacherous, the journey may be difficult, but in pursuit of peace, dignity, and happiness, women have always come out as winners and how!

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