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Alcohol and other factors affecting osteoporosis risk in women

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By about age 35, people reach their peak bone mass. Women lose bone mass slowly after that point until a few years after menopause, when bone mass is lost very rapidly. For middle-aged and older women, healthy bones depend on the development, during younger years, of a strong bone structure and an adequate peak bone mass. There is tenuous evidence that moderate alcohol consumption may protect bone. But human and animal studies clearly indicate that chronic heavy drinking, particularly during adolescence and the young adult years, can dramatically compromise bone quality and may increase osteoporosis risk. Further, research indicates that the effects of heavy alcohol use on bone cannot be reversed, even if alcohol consumption is terminated. Research suggests that in addition to alcohol, other lifestyle factors—such as tobacco use, nutrition, weight-bearing exercise, increased body weight, and hormone replacement therapy—affect bone development and osteoporosis risk in women. However, there has been little examination of how alcohol interacts with these factors to influence bone health.

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