

Remember: You can live well with osteoporosis!

Navigating Winter

This article was first featured in November 2014 as an expansion of one published in the November 2005 issue of Coping. We wish to thank Gail Lemieux, one of the co-founders of COPN, who wrote the original article based on her personal experience of winter.

The memory of the time I had slipped and fallen on some ice in front of my home, in the middle of a blizzard, still produces fear in my heart. Whenever I head out on an errand, I think about how people with osteoporosis need to be extra alert and aware of the dangers that can present themselves at this time of year.

When I fell that night just steps away from my front door, I fractured two vertebrae. These fractures in my back were so painful that I couldn't get up. I lay helpless on the cold ground as the wind-swept snow gradually covered me. Sometime later, I was found by neighbours who were out for a walk. They first thought I was a garbage can on the ground, covered with snow! This painful experience taught me not to take navigating winter lightly and I would like to share with you some of the things I have learned:

Do I Really Need to Go Out?

Always be aware of the winter weather conditions. If the weather is, or threatens to turn, bad, ask yourself if it is really necessary to go out. I have learned that the pain, disability and impact on my life caused by a fracture are much more important than what I might accomplish by going out on days when the weather report tells me I should stay in. Whether walking or driving, some days it is just not smart to be out. On days like these, you can always do something else such as writing to COPN to share with us *your* experiences of winter!

Outdoor Walking

- When you go out be sure to wear proper walking boots. These need to be comfortable with low heels and non-slip soles with a good tread.
- There are a number of anti-slip devices, often called ice grips or ice grippers, that slip over your boots or shoes. These devices have spikes or coils on the soles to give you better footing on slippery streets, sidewalks and parking lots so that you don't slip and land on your wrist or hip, possibly breaking a bone. However, if you

In this issue

- Fracture Fact
- Navigating Winter
- The Dog Ate My Cookie
- Funny Bone
- OC Recipe of the Issue

Fracture Fact:

A man who suffers a heart attack from shovelling snow blames his heart, not the snow bank - but a patient who breaks his/her wrist from a simple fall blames the floor.

wear such devices, do remember two very important things:

- Don't be over confident that just because you have these devices on you won't slip and fall. You still need to avoid icy and slippery surfaces if possible and you still need to walk carefully.
- While they are safer to wear outdoors, the opposite can be true indoors. Therefore, be sure to remove them before you go into a store or mall because they are very slippery on indoor floors when they are wet.
- If you use a cane as a walking aid, there is another type of ice gripper you can get for your mobility device. This attaches to the foot of the cane to provide extra grip on a variety of surfaces. The ice grip attachment is secure and easy to install; it flips down to use and flips up again when not in use. These ice grippers come with one ice prong or five ice prongs and are extremely handy for helping you with your balance when there is snow or ice on the ground that cannot be avoided.
- Be alert for hidden ice. Is the road/sidewalk/driveway/parking lot cleared of snow, free from ice, sanded or salted and easy to walk on? Think about where you are going and whether the destination will have clear and safe access.
- Be very careful when getting on or off a bus or streetcar as the road and the steps may be slippery.

Driving

Winter driving can be difficult for everyone, but if you have osteoporosis, even a small accident may cause a broken bone. Here are some winter driving tips:

- Whether you are a passenger or a driver, make sure to always wear a seat belt.
- Can you get into or out of the car easily, and has your destination been cleared of ice and snow?
- Make sure your vehicle is in good repair.
- Install winter tires.
- Change your wiper blades to winter ones; they do a better job of removing snow and ice to improve your visibility.
- If you drive a lot during the winter, take a course on winter driving skills and skid control.
- Watch out for black ice.
- Avoid sudden moves with your car.
- Accelerate and brake slowly.
- Maintain a safe following distance.
- Drive for the conditions: slow down and drive below the posted speed limit if conditions are bad. *Always drive with your headlights on even in the daytime and all year round. This will make you more visible to other drivers and will improve your safety.*
- If you are on your own and need to clear the snow from your car, do so very carefully and in small sections. Avoid awkward positions such as bending forward and twisting as these put undue stress on your back.
- Use your defroster to help clear your windshield while you warm up your car. A little extra patience can help you achieve the same result with less physical exertion and a lower risk for spine fractures (broken bones in your back).

If you are like most Canadians, you probably do not want to miss out on winter's glories entirely. Exercise in the outdoors can be a great way to strengthen your muscles and bones but if you have had a fracture or are at high risk of fracture, many winter activities, such as skating, downhill skiing or tobogganing, are probably not appropriate for you. Still on a clear, sunny day when the sidewalks are dry and ice free, you can

get some exercise by bundling up for a brisk walk with a friend. If you choose to walk alone, make sure that someone knows where you are going and how long you will be gone. If there is an activity that you have always participated in and are skilled at, such as snowshoeing or cross country skiing, you may still be able to continue doing it depending on your fracture risk and your overall fitness. Check with your physician or a fitness professional to be sure.



Winter can be a wonderful time to be outside enjoying the wonderland it brings. Just prepare, be aware, stay cautious, and you, too, can have some fun while taking good care of your bones.

We Welcome Your Feedback

- Have a question?
- Is there an osteoporosis-related topic that you would like to see featured in the newsletter?
- Looking for a great volunteer opportunity?

Please contact us by calling Osteoporosis Canada's toll-free number **1-800-463-6842** or emailing copn@osteoporosis.ca.

The Dog Ate My Cookie

You could have heard a pin drop. More than 100 of us were waiting, smiles at the ready, for Jim Taylor, famed sports columnist and funnyman, to continue. It was October 2011, and we had gathered at a pub in Richmond, BC for the inaugural Bones 'n' Beer, our unique event to raise awareness of men and osteoporosis. We eagerly anticipated Jim, our keynote speaker, to tell us inside stories about the many celebrities he knew - after all, he wrote the books on Wayne Gretzky and Rick Hansen. Instead, he shocked us all by opening with: I have osteoporosis. The way I found out, I sneezed a mighty sneeze and felt something race down my lower spine like someone was unzipping my fly. For the next half hour he had us on the edge of our seats, and yes laughing too, as he recounted his experience with the disease. His story, first published in COPING in 2011, is reprinted here for us all to enjoy one more time.

Jim Taylor passed away on January 7, 2019 at his home in Shawinigan Lake, BC at the age of 82.

Okay, full disclosure: Eighteen months ago, I couldn't have spelled "osteoporosis" if you spotted me the "osis". Then I discovered that I had it. Amazing, how quickly a perspective can change.

The way I found out, I sneezed a mighty sneeze and felt something race down my lower spine like someone was unzipping my fly.

Just like that, I had five compression fractures; spent one month in hospital and two more in a hospital bed in front of the TV at home (the soccer World Cup, thank God, was in progress. I watched all 64 games); lost 48 pounds; learned to walk again by shoving a three-wheeled grocery cart on eternal trips down the hall for five or six weeks; and lived with the indignity of having someone else wipe my butt when nature called.

The point is, osteoporosis was something about which I knew nothing and probably wouldn't have cared if I did. One sneeze, and I was having an interesting discussion with a doctor about bone density which I might have shrugged off had the bones involved not been mine.

"You know when you're shooting pool and chalk up your cue?" he asked conversationally. "Your bones are like that."

"The cue?" I said, hopefully.

"Not the cue," he said, "the chalk. Oh, and by the way, you've also got scoliosis. Your back has a new bend in it. Or did you just think everyone else was getting taller?"

Fine. Another "osis". Wayne Gretzky would be proud of me. I had an osis hat trick: osteo, scolio and hemochromatosis, from the Latin meaning "You've got so much iron in your blood, it's a wonder you get through airport security."

But this back thing was a mystery. Clearly, it wasn't the sneeze that did it. More likely, something else had pushed my spine to the edge, and the sneeze tipped me over. Probably that wonderful vacation in Spain a couple of years earlier, when my wife got pneumonia, I stumbled and fell down five or six stairs, and we spent our week on the Costa del Sol in matching single hospital beds. (My friends were not surprised. In the old days, fellow Vancouver Sun sports columnist, Jim Kearney and I were known as Butch Casualty and the Sunstroke Kid for our ability to get hurt on road trips.)

There is a point to this meandering, and it is this: **Osteoporosis is not restricted to women**, as mythology suggests. It is an equal opportunity bone basher, and unless you get a bone density check you are potentially playing Russian Roulette.

I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm a writer, which means I can work at home in my pajamas if I like. But it's been 18 months since I drove my car. Walking (or, for that matter, sitting) for any length of time is pretty much out of the question. What if I had to commute? What if I had to operate a jackhammer? The other day I dropped a cookie, got down on the floor and had to call my wife to help me up. Worse yet, the dog beat me to the cookie. What if my job required heavy lifting? How long would I keep it?

I've adjusted. But, maybe if I'd had my bone density checked years ago, I wouldn't have to.

One more thing:

Don't sneeze.

FUNNY BONE:

An elderly lady was riding her motor bike and knitting at the same time. An officer drove up beside her and shouted, "PULL OVER!" She replied "SOCKS!"

OC Recipe of the Issue

MAC AND CHEESE WITH A VEGGIE TWIST

Preparation Time: 20 mins

Cook Time: 20 mins

Serves: 4

Calcium: 42% DV*



This sauce is very creamy and chock full of vegetables and colour. If you don't have time to cut the vegetables small, simply chop them larger and let them cook a bit longer so they are soft throughout.

Ingredients

1 1/2 cups (375 mL) whole wheat macaroni or fusilli
2 tsp (10 mL) soft non hydrogenated margarine
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 carrot, finely chopped
1/2 cup (125 mL) finely chopped red pepper
1/2 cup (125 mL) grated zucchini
2 tbsp (30 mL) all purpose flour
2 cups (500 mL) skim milk
1 tsp (5 mL) chopped fresh thyme or 1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried thyme leaves
1 cup (250 mL) shredded light old Cheddar cheese
1 tsp (5 mL) Dijon mustard
Pinch fresh ground pepper

Frozen Vegetable Option

Omit carrot, red pepper and zucchini and substitute 2 cups (500 mL) diced or mixed frozen vegetables in the sauce.

*The percentage of calcium is based on the Osteoporosis Canada's daily calcium requirement for people under 50 years of age of 1000 mg.

Preparation

In a pot, bring water to boil. Add macaroni and cook for about 6 minutes or until pasta is tender but firm. Drain well and set aside.

In a large saucepan, heat margarine over medium heat and cook onion and garlic for 1 minute. Add carrot, red pepper and zucchini and cook, stirring for about 5 minutes or until softened. Stir in flour and cook, stirring until flour is absorbed. Slowly pour in milk and thyme; stir until smooth. Cook, stirring for about 5 minutes or until starting to bubble. Stir in cheese, mustard and pepper. Remove from heat and stir until melted and smooth. Stir in cooked macaroni until well coated.

For more information, [click here](#) to view the recipe online.