

Remember: You can live well with osteoporosis!

A Mother's Determination

In this issue

- A Mother's Determination
- Fracture Fact
- Funny Bone
- Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Eleanor Mills' Boney Express
- A Recipe from our Sponsor

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Fracture Fact:

A study recently reported that only 44% of people discharged from hospital for a hip fracture return home; of the rest, 10% go to another hospital, 27% go to rehabilitation care, and 17% go to long-term care facilities.



Crack! Christine Thomas was only 42 when, bending to lift her newborn daughter, she fractured her spine. Diagnosed with five vertebral fractures as a result of unsuspected osteoporosis, she had no idea of the painful and transformative road she would have to travel to build stronger bones and reclaim her life. Here is her story.

I Get Knocked Down But I Get Up Again...

Eleven years ago, I could look down the road and see nothing but sunshine. That was before I was struck by the disease that is not just for older women, the disease that robbed me of everything I had taken for granted, the disease I never even saw coming.

I had recently completed my Executive MBA at Queen's University and I was climbing the ladder of success in the federal government. I was living comfortably with my executive husband, and we were anticipating the birth of our first child with enthusiasm and cautious excitement.

At 42, I had had three earlier miscarriages. Determined to give birth to a healthy baby, I followed doctors' orders scrupulously. In September 2001, my daughter Chanel was born, at 8 1/2 pounds with good health. Now my daughter Chanel is 11 and still a bundle of energetic good health.

My own story has been a little darker. Because mine was a high risk pregnancy, I spent eight weeks on bed rest in the most expensive hotel of the nation's capital - the Ottawa Hospital Civic Campus. I had also been put on blood thinners. Both the bed rest and the medications proved devastating, robbing me of precious bone density. I had poor bone health going into the pregnancy but at the time, I did not know that.

1st Punch

The extent of the devastation revealed itself almost as soon as I arrived home with the baby. I was leaning over the crib to pick up my newborn daughter when I felt a jolt of pain. It nearly caused me to pass out. Luckily my husband was there to catch me from falling. The pain was debilitating.

2nd Punch

After a minor fall, I found myself in excruciating pain. It was relentless and unbearable.

Final blow

After numerous appointments and a trip to emergency, I discovered, in a diagnosis made weeks later, that I had five spinal fractures, the result of severe osteoporosis.

Dr. Phil talks about defining moments in life - traumatic events that change your approach to life. Getting that phone call from the doctor telling me that I had five spinal fractures and severe osteoporosis was a defining moment for me. I wanted a quick fix. I was unable to care for my newborn baby or myself. We had to hire a full time caregiver who was bonding with my daughter more than I was.

That was then and this is now. My journey to recovery was long and a lot of hard work and it still is today. Here are my lessons learned:

1. Bone loss and fracture can happen to anyone at any age.
2. Whether pre- or post-fracture, there are always steps that can be taken towards improving bone health and quality of life.
3. Take an active role in maintaining your well-being. Doctors don't have all the answers.
4. Be the captain of your healthcare team. Do your homework before your medical appointments (i.e. know your family history; read up on medications available in Canada for bone health)
5. Improve your overall nutrition through food choices first before choosing supplements and ensure your diet includes adequate amounts of calcium and take the recommended doses of Vitamin D supplements for your age. (OC does recommend routine daily vitamin D supplementation for all Canadian adults year round.)
6. Include regular, progressive and varied bone building exercise and activities in your life (weight-bearing, such as brisk walking; strength training such as resistance bands; and flexibility routines such as stretches)
7. Osteoporosis Canada has made huge strides in raising awareness for the disease but we all still have a lot more work to do! There are far too many broken bones that could be prevented. We need to educate not only the public but healthcare professionals as well.

Sometimes when I tell my story I can feel the tears just about to surface, as it brings back such painful memories. But I feel that sharing my story is critical in helping others.

What is amazing is that in the 10 years that I have been a volunteer for OC my story has appeared in Osteoblast (OC's former newsletter) in the Annual Report, in a request for donation letter, in five Canadian newspapers, in a Globe and Mail insert, in many local Ottawa newspapers, on TV and radio, in the first OC Report Card and in a DVD.

It was a natural progression for me to write my book, although I must say, it was an incredible amount of work! I wrote *Unbreakable, A Woman's Triumph Over Osteoporosis*, to share my hard won expertise on managing osteoporosis and preventing fractures caused by this potentially debilitating disease.

In *Unbreakable* I speak about my journey to dispel myths and encourage people to take care of their bones. When I was diagnosed with the disease I could not find any books that were helpful. *Unbreakable* is intended to **increase awareness and to** complement the advice of health care professionals, not replace it.

What I am determined to do now, besides pay close attention to my own health, is get the word out that osteoporosis is a big deal. It has terrible long-term ramifications, both individually and socially. And, since it's often only discovered after a sudden and surprising fracture, it seems to invade one's life like a thief in the night.

But bones, even declining ones, can be kept healthy. The first step is awareness. People just don't think osteoporosis can happen to them. They think, 'I'll worry about it when I'm 80 or 90.' I am here to tell them that waiting is not an option.

Christine Thomas, the past chairwoman of the Ottawa Chapter of Osteoporosis Canada, has spent the better part of the past decade speaking out about osteoporosis. She is a dynamic speaker who has shared her story of living with osteoporosis with audiences across Canada. A former senior mediator with the Canada Revenue Agency, who studied at the universities of Carleton, Queen's and Harvard, Christine now uses her skills as a passionate advocate of awareness, education and research on osteoporosis.

The Scientific Advisory Council of Osteoporosis Canada has endorsed Christine's book **Unbreakable, A Woman's Triumph Over Osteoporosis**. All profits from sales go directly to Osteoporosis Canada. If you would like to read the book or to contact Christine for a speaking engagement go to the website: www.christinethomas.com

Two other books published recently have also received OC endorsement: **The Osteoporosis Book**, third edition, by Gwen Ellert RN, MEd, Alan Low PharmD, CCD and John Wade MD, FRCPC (<http://osteoporosisbook.com>) and **The Intelligent Patient Guide to Osteoporosis** by Roger A.L. Sutton MD, FRCPC and Robert G. Josse, MD, FRCPC. For more information on these books' availability, check your local bookstore.



Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Eleanor Mills' Boney Express



This is a special Mother's Day for Osteoporosis Canada. Twenty years ago, on a cloudy and chilly Mother's Day morning in 1993, Eleanor Mills set out from Victoria, B.C. guiding her walker-chair on the first of the five kilometre walks that would be the signature of her visits to 90 communities across Canada. The final destination for Eleanor and her Boney Express? Saint John's, Newfoundland, two years and more than 7200 kilometres away.

What motivated this 79 year old woman, suffering from multiple spinal fractures to take on such a monumental task? - Her determination to prove to the hundreds of thousands of Canadians with osteoporosis that it is possible to overcome the pain, discomfort and loss of mobility that osteoporosis brings.

Eleanor said "Osteoporosis has relentlessly pursued and disabled women and men for centuries, Now that early diagnosis and preventive measures are available, it is our

duty to get 'out there' and spread the news. We need to let people know about this disease before they have a fracture as I have had."

Eleanor realized she had a serious problem in the late 1970s when she noticed that the hem of her calf-length dress had suddenly reached her ankles. "That afternoon, I'd heard a very unusual crushing sound and felt a vibration as I awkwardly held onto some heavy grocery bags and tried to open the door to my home," she said. "The instant height loss was inexplicable. It was only later that I realized the sound I'd heard was the crushing of my spine. At the time there was no pain. That was to come later."

Fifteen years later, after Eleanor had been involved in an experimental exercise and treatment program for osteoporosis sufferers at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Toronto she acquired a wheeled walker. A Sunday afternoon stroll with her walker inspired Eleanor to undertake a cross-country walk. "I got in touch with others I knew in the osteoporosis field and then I started training."

Beginning with those first steps in Victoria, Eleanor and her Boney Express spent two summers joining walkers in communities across Canada. Lauding the many volunteers who supported the walk in each community, she said, "Those who helped me were simply splendid. They cannot be praised eloquently enough for helping me - a woman they had never heard of, and never met."

Eleanor's mission did not end with the walk. For another decade she inspired countless thousands as the patron of the Osteoporosis Society of Canada, regularly attending national board meetings and special Society events and always encouraging all those affected by osteoporosis to "Never give up!"

Eleanor Mills, Patron of Osteoporosis Canada, died at her home in Toronto on October 5, 2004. In commemoration of her, each year Osteoporosis Canada bestows its highest award – The Eleanor Mills Inspiration Award - to the volunteer who, like Eleanor, has embraced his or her own osteoporosis, and by doing so, has inspired others with his or her determination, perseverance and optimism.

Her Legacy Lives on in Our Staff and Volunteers

Eleanor Mills touched the lives of so many Canadians, none more so than the staff and volunteers who participated in the original Boney Express. One of those individuals shares her story of the impact Eleanor had on her life.

Judy Cline – "I was an active physiotherapist when I became involved with the Boney Express through a young friend (an Olympic rower) who was the co-chair of the walk. Eleanor was engaging, determined and moved like lightning with her walker. Eleanor achieved her aim of spreading the news about osteoporosis and its often devastating effects. As an active healthcare practitioner then and now in retirement, I am impressed with the major changes since her walk in both public and healthcare professional awareness of osteoporosis.

I continue to be involved as an active volunteer with Osteoporosis Canada. My biggest focus this year is to finish writing the story of Eleanor, her life, the walks and the people she inspired through those walks.



A Recipe from our Sponsor

Greek Veggie, Chicken & Cheese Wrap



Making your own lunch is easy with a little advance planning and strategy. Wrap up this tasty vegetable mixture, chicken and zingy Canadian Feta cheese in a pita with a luscious yogurt dip on the side and you'll have a lunch that'll be the envy of your co-workers.

Course: *Main Dishes* Preparation Time: *10 mins*

Yields : *4 servings*

3/4 milk product serving(s) per person

Preparation

- 1/2 cup (125 ml) **2% plain yogurt**
- 1 tsp (5 ml) grated lemon zest
- 1 large black olive, minced
- 4 large lettuce leaves
- 4 large (about 9 inches/23 cm) whole wheat pita breads
- 1 cup (250 ml) shredded cooked boneless skinless chicken breast
- 1 cup (250 ml) chopped English cucumber
- 1 cup (250 ml) grape or cherry tomatoes, cut in half
- 2 tbsp (30 ml) very thinly sliced red onion (optional)

- 3 1/2 oz (100 g) **diced Canadian Feta cheese**
- 1 tsp (5 ml) dried oregano

Instructions

In a bowl, combine yogurt, lemon zest and olive. Portion into individual containers or one container, cover and refrigerate until serving, for up to 1 day.

Place one lettuce leaf on each pita; arrange chicken, cucumber, tomatoes, onion (if using), Canadian Feta cheese and oregano in a line down the centre of each, dividing evenly. Fold top and bottom of pita over filling, then roll up pita tightly around filling to enclose.

Wrap tightly in plastic wrap or waxed paper and refrigerate until serving, for up to 4 hours.

To serve, unwrap pita, cut in half crosswise, if desired, and serve with lemon-olive yogurt for dipping or spreading.

Tips

Lining the pita with a lettuce leaf keeps the pita from getting soggy. Be sure to pat the lettuce dry thoroughly after washing.

Grill or roast some extra chicken when you're making dinner to use in these wraps. You'll need about 1 boneless skinless breast for this recipe. Wrap cooled cooked chicken and refrigerate for up to 2 days.

If you want to make these wraps and eat them right away, you can spread the lemon-olive yogurt on the pita before assembling the wrap instead of serving it on the side.

For more information about this recipe:

<http://www.dairygoodness.ca/getenough/recipes/greek-veggie-chicken-cheese-wrap/>

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