

Drug treatment combined with exercise could be the best osteoporosis therapy

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In Europe, 30 million people suffer from osteoporosis, which is a disease that occurs when the body loses too much bone. These patients are at much higher risk of breaking a bone than the general population.

Various medications are available to treat osteoporosis to improve bone strength and reduce the risk of fracture. In addition, the current German osteoporosis guidelines also recommend exercise, together with a bone-healthy diet as basic therapy, to reduce falls and strengthen bones.

Researchers from the Hochschule für Gesundheit (HS Gesundheit) in Bochum, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Ruhr University Bochum and Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia, are now going one step further. "After evaluating the available studies, we believe we that sport and exercise, in addition to [medication](#) against [osteoporosis](#), can actually help to improve [bone](#) density and strengthen the effect of the medication," says Prof. Dr. Daniel Belavy from HS Gesundheit. However, according to the Professor of Physiotherapy, the quality of the evidence is not yet sufficient to make definitive statements.

In total, the scientists analyzed five studies with 530 participants. "The results so far have been promising," says Daniel Belavy. "However, a well-organized and large-scale clinical trial would need to be conducted to confirm the trends we found and provide clear evidence. It is already well understood that regular exercise reduces the risk of someone with osteoporosis tripping and falling. This is important as this then reduces the risk of fractures."

The researchers' initial question, "Does it really help if osteoporosis patients do sport in addition to taking medication?" goes back to Ann-Kathrin Schumm's master's thesis at HS Gesundheit. "From my practical experience, I am aware of the great uncertainty of both those affected by osteoporosis and their physiotherapists with regard to the use of active measures despite osteoporosis being treated with medication. After all, fractures could possibly be the result," says Schumm. "The work gives a first positive indication in this regard, even if further research is required."

"It's great that Ann-Kathrin Schumm has dealt with this important topic as part of her Masters degree," commented Daniel Belavy. "Such projects strengthen the profile of the physiotherapy profession. In particular, the cooperation with the [medical doctors](#) as part of the work was an important step so that patients can receive optimal and scientifically based osteoporosis therapy in the future."

The study is published in the journal *Osteoporosis International*.

More information: Ann-Kathrin Schumm et al, Does adding exercise or physical activity to pharmacological osteoporosis therapy in patients with increased fracture risk improve bone mineral density and lower fracture risk? A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Osteoporosis International* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s00198-023-06829-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00198-023-06829-0)

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