The statistics are enough to drive you to drink a tall glass of calcium-rich milk: Osteoporosis, the disease that causes bones to become weak, brittle and more likely to break, affects more than 10 million Americans. One in three women and one in five men over 50 will experience an osteoporosis-related fracture, according to the International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF).

If the threat of a broken bone doesn’t scare you, consider these IOF statistics: More than 20 percent of people who fracture a hip die within a year. Those who survive hip fractures often suffer profound losses in mobility and independence, and fewer than half of them ever regain their previous level of function. Depending on your age, these worries may sound far off in the future — but regardless of your age, the time to do something about them is right now.

**Five tips for preventing osteoporosis**

1. **Build your bone bank.** Up to age 30, your body is building the bone mass that will carry you through the rest of your life. After 30, you begin to lose a little bone mass every year. If you or your children are in your bone-building years, make a concerted effort to get plenty of calcium to build your lifetime bone banks. Start with that tall glass of milk. Then have a couple more.

2. **Know your risks.** People with osteoporosis in the family have a genetically higher risk of fractures. Asian and Caucasian women, thin or small-framed women, smokers and heavy drinkers also have higher risks. So do people with Crohn’s disease, celiac disease and other conditions that make it difficult to absorb nutrients. Reduce the risks that are within your control (drink less, don’t smoke), and take extra precautions (see below) to help compensate for the rest.

3. **Feed your bones.** Low calcium intake plays a major role in the development of osteoporosis, so feed your bones some calcium every day. Milk is a great choice. Lactose intolerant? Lactaid is real milk with the lactose removed. Prefer other milk alternatives? Check the labels to make sure they’re fortified with calcium and vitamin D. See page 8 for more bone-building food sources.
4. **Give your bones a daily workout.** Multiple studies have shown the importance of physical activity in building bone mass. From childhood to late adulthood, spending less time on your fanny and more time on your feet — walking, running, gardening, playing tennis, lifting weights, dancing — has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of osteoporosis and fractures.

5. **Check your meds.** Corticosteroids are known to interfere with bone building. Medications used to treat seizures, depression, acid reflux and cancer also can reduce bone density. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the potential effects of your medications on your bones, and what you can do to protect yourself.

**Five tips for living with osteoporosis**

If you’ve been diagnosed with osteoporosis — or osteopenia, the lowered bone density that can precede osteoporosis — there’s still plenty you can do to rebuild and protect what you’ve got. In addition to continuing all of the above:

1. **Consider meds.** Drug treatments for osteoporosis can help you not only maintain, but also rebuild bone density. Research shows that these medications can reduce the risk of hip fractures by up to 40 percent, and vertebral fractures by 30 to 70 percent. Ask your doctor if medication is appropriate for you.

2. **Supplement your calcium and D.** Calcium isn’t just for kids. Supplementing with calcium and vitamin D reduces bone loss and fractures in older adults.

3. **Talk to your doctor about exercise.** Therapeutic exercise programs can help postmenopausal women maintain or increase their bone density.

4. **Work on your balance.** About 90 percent of hip fractures result from falls. Learning — and doing — exercises to improve your balance can be just as important as taking medication for osteoporosis.

5. **Take up tai chi.** Studies find that people who practice tai chi have 47 percent fewer falls and 25 percent fewer hip fractures than those who don’t.