

Supplement helps bones grow stronger

Age greatly increases a person's chance of experiencing the pain of excessive bone loss. In the U.S., companies are selling strontium supplements to promote bone health and prevent osteoporosis. Based on European studies, it is likely that these supplements are as effective as drugs commonly used to treat osteoporosis in the United States.

Question: What is the European experience with strontium use?

Answer: A drug called strontium ranelate is commonly prescribed in several European countries. It is produced by a French company called Servier and sold under the brand name Protelos. The drug works by providing the mineral strontium, which is incorporated into bones much like calcium.

Human trials show that strontium stimulates bone growth, inhibits bone loss and therefore

decreases the incidence of bone fractures to the same extent as older and more commonly used bisphosphonate drugs such as Fosamax and Boniva.

The patented prescription drug Protelos is growing in popularity in Europe because it does not produce the same side effects as other common osteoporosis drugs. Since it is considered a drug, strontium ranelate must still go through the approval process prior to use in the U.S.

Q: Are strontium dietary supplements likely to function like strontium ranelate?

A: The nonpatentable forms of strontium supplements, such as strontium citrate, should dissolve and deliver strontium to the bones just as efficiently as strontium ranelate. Early animal studies showing bone benefits used these common forms of strontium. The ranelate component of strontium ranelate has no active effect and is simply

eliminated from the body through the urine.

Q: Are strontium supplements a reliable source of strontium?

A: Not always. A study reported at the 2007 International Bone and Mineral Research Conference in Honolulu found that three out of five products tested contained significantly less strontium than their labels indicated. The two properly labeled products were AOR Strontium Support and Strontium Bone Maker.

Although strontium supplements are available without prescription, it is best to use them only with the knowledge and guidance of a physician. In response to growing interest in strontium supplements, researchers at the University of California-Davis Medical Center just launched a three-month human study on the bone health effects of strontium citrate supplements.

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