

Loss of Height with Age: Can You Prevent It?

Some loss of height with age is inevitable, but the amount of height people lose varies – and, yes, nutrition and exercise play a role. You lose height because discs, the soft sponge-like pads that cushion the vertebrae in the spine, lose water and shrink in size. Women generally give up more height over the years than men. On average, men lose about 2 inches of height between the age of 30 and 80, while women shrink around 3 inches.

Can you do anything to reduce the amount of height you lose as you grow older? Strength training and weight-bearing exercise strengthen and help to support the vertebral column. This reduces shrinkage. Exercise also reduces the risk of osteoporosis, a more serious cause of height loss.

Researchers in Israel followed over 2,000 women and men for 30 years. They discovered that those who exercised regularly lost half as much height as those who were more sedentary. Time to hit the weight room! Monitor your height closely after the age of 30. If you lose height at a rapid rate, it may be a sign of osteoporosis.

Don't Neglect Nutrition

Nutrition plays a role in how tall you are in your later years as well. It's important to get enough vitamin D and calcium to maintain bone health. Many people have low or marginally low levels of vitamin D. That's why it's a good idea to get a vitamin D level checked to make sure you don't need to take a supplement, especially if you get minimal sun exposure.

Other habits that can cause greater loss of height with age include smoking, excessive use of alcohol, eating a poor diet and taking certain medications such as corticosteroids.

The Bottom Line?

Chances are you'll lose some of your height as you grow older, but you can limit that loss by strength training, doing weight bearing exercise and targeted exercises that strengthen your core and back muscles. Don't neglect nutrition. A healthy diet with adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D helps to maintain a strong spinal

column so you can still reach things on the upper shelf even when you're eighty years old – without heels.

Wall Street Journal Health. "Yes, You Are Getting Shorter"

Harvard Medical Publications. "Osteoporosis & Height Loss: Why It Happens and How to Prevent It"

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