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# BONES FOR LIFE®

**Are you concerned about posture? Bone strength? They are related.  
BONES FOR LIFE explores the connections, and improves both!**

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BONES FOR LIFE, based on the movement-based mind-body discipline known as the FELDENKRAIS METHOD®, is a revolutionary new approach to improving alignment and increasing bone strength. Ruthy Alon, one of the earliest students trained by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, has combined her understanding of the relationship between an aligned skeleton and strong bones to develop this work.

Most of us are concerned about posture in one way or another. Like the FELDENKRAIS METHOD®, BONES FOR LIFE teaches that “good posture” is our birthright – that our skeletons were designed to be upright without using our muscles to *force* ourselves into alignment. Both methods also emphasize *dynamic, functional alignment*, where the optimal configuration of the skeleton at any moment is that suited to the task at hand, not a rigid, static “straightness.”

Many of us are also concerned about bone strength, or bone density. Women over 40 or 50 want to avoid osteoporosis, and many older women and men want to reverse it. Anyone who has broken a hip, or who knows someone who has, is aware of the very real danger of brittle bones. Many are also aware that loss of height – or “shrinking” – is related to bent, hunched posture and loss of bone density.

Osteoporosis and brittle bones were long thought to be a natural part of aging in our society. However, several recent discoveries have changed this thinking. Outer space exploration revealed that young, fit astronauts suffered dramatic bone loss when not subject to gravity. It was determined that *impact* – the striking of one’s heel into the earth – was essential for continued generation of new bone cells, and floating in a zero-gravity environment provides no impact. It was also discovered that bone loss could be reversed, that when astronauts returned to gravity and to a program of impacting the earth, their bone mass could be restored. It is this impact which allows calcium in the diet to be absorbed.

Another crucial discovery is that measurable bone density does not necessarily correspond to bone breakage. Recent research has shown that African women who bear heavy loads on their heads have only 5% the bone fractures of Western women, despite *lower* bone density. What these women have is *functional bone strength*. This research helped inspire Ruthy Alon to develop BONES FOR LIFE.

As you may imagine, good alignment is necessary in carrying an urn of water on one’s head. Distortions would result in spilling the water, breaking the urn, or both! Alignment is based on each vertebra being capable of movement. If you imagine the spine as a chain, when several links get stuck together the vertebrae cannot move to stack one on top of the next. Each vertebra capable of movement also means there can be *transmission of movement* through the skeleton. This enables blood (carrying nutrients and oxygen) to penetrate the solid tissue of the bone and provide for growth of new bone cells. In our society, we have fewer and fewer opportunities for transmission of movement, as more and more of our work is done with wheels, automatic doors and escalators. BONES FOR LIFE, invaluable for women and men of any age, is oriented towards developing a springy and dynamic walk, which stimulates bone growth. It is also about recovering one’s natural alignment, without which a springy walk is impossible.

In life we hold ourselves in many different, and often contradictory, ways. If you watch people jog, you will see that some move forward with their knees, but backward with their chest, or forward with their head, but backward with their pelvis. Moshe Feldenkrais called this “cross-motivation”: part of you wants to go forward, part of you doesn’t. Contrast this with a Disney animation of a squirrel bounding through the forest, and how

movement flows buoyantly from one part of the squirrel's body to the next. You can also see this direct transmission of movement in slow motion footage of gifted runners.

Rather than direct transmission involving every vertebra and every part of the body, we often try to do most of the work of walking with our feet. The FELDENKRAIS METHOD teaches that walking is simpler and more comfortable when the movement travels through the pelvis, spine, ribcage, chest and head. In BONES FOR LIFE, students lie down and push their feet into the floor, and notice where the impact goes. They then push into the wall with their hands, and notice what happens to that force. In the beginning, the effort often does not travel anywhere – or the force from the feet goes only as far as the pelvis, or the force from the hands doesn't get through to the feet.

Through these and other ingeniously-designed movement processes, the information gets to the brain that we have other options than holding on and preventing the flow of movement. BONES FOR LIFE students quickly begin to find the connections, and to develop a much springier walk. The use of wall and floor provides the feedback of what we are doing and how we are doing it. The wall gives the kind of feedback that we as bi-peds get only through our feet in walking, but which quadrupeds get through all four extremities.

When people begin traditional impact activity to develop bone strength, the irony is that they often injure themselves. The movement limitations and alignment problems that put them at risk for fracture also mean that running, weight-lifting and even walking are too much. BONES FOR LIFE provides a safer, surer way to bone strength. Much of the work is done lying on the floor, which then allows a person to come to their feet in a more aligned, organized way, so that impact is both comfortable and non-injurious. BONES also utilizes a length of cloth, called a harness, which allows students even with significant limitations to jump safely.

In my experience as both student and teacher of BONES FOR LIFE, I have found one of the main results is becoming *sturdy*. My students often use this word, and I find I have a confidence on my feet I didn't have before. BONES explores every aspect of walking, how movement passes through the body from the peeling off of the foot to the top of the head. Students also learn very quickly what true alignment means, and are able to discard various myths and illusions about it.

Case studies conducted by Ruthy Alon in Israel, where students did BONES FOR LIFE daily for just four months, showed measurable bone growth. As anyone who has had a bone density test knows, bone growth (and loss) is exceedingly slow, so this is quite remarkable. The gains of dynamic movement and alignment are enormous whether one is immediately concerned about bone strength or not.

There is tremendous joy in movement which flows unimpeded through one's self. This is our birthright, but something we find so seldom. BONES FOR LIFE, and the FELDENKRAIS METHOD on which it is based, provide this sense of vitality we all search for. This vitality, evidenced in a springy, dynamic walk, are based on what Ruthy Alon calls "biological optimism" – that this is the way we were meant to be. Strong bones and dynamic alignment can be realized by utilizing the astonishing intelligence and power of our own evolved brains.

For more information on BONES FOR LIFE, see [www.bonesforlife.com](http://www.bonesforlife.com). Louise Runyon is a GUILD CERTIFIED FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONER and a certified BONES FOR LIFE teacher based in Atlanta. She is also a dancer/choreographer with over 20 years experience teaching movement. Louise offers both BONES FOR LIFE and FELDENKRAIS® classes in Decatur, through Evening at Emory and other venues. She also incorporates BONES FOR LIFE movement processes in her individual, hands-on FELDENKRAIS practice. Louise can be reached at 404-728-8991, [louiserunyon@aol.com](mailto:louiserunyon@aol.com) or [www.FeldenkraisAtlanta.com](http://www.FeldenkraisAtlanta.com).

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