

Can we talk... about osteoporosis?

After her
2002
diagnosis,
comédienne
Joan Rivers got
serious about
bone
health

A recent fall down a flight of New York City subway stairs could have left television icon Joan Rivers with broken bones, or worse. And if the fall had happened a few years ago, those scary outcomes would have been the feisty funny-woman's likely fate. Luckily, things turned out differently. "The only thing hurt was my pride," says Joan, 77, who eight years ago was diagnosed with osteoporosis, a condition that causes bones to become so weak and brittle that a minor stress like coughing, let alone a serious fall, can easily cause them to break. Some 10 million Americans have the condition.

Famous for making light of almost any subject, Joan's taken her osteoporosis diagnosis seriously. The glamorous hostess of E!'s *Fashion Police* shows, and TVLand's former show, *How'd You Get So Rich*, still jokes that her idea of exercise is going to Tiffany's once a week to lift diamonds. But, in reality, Joan's made a number of important changes to keep her bones strong.

As frank as she is about her serial plastic surgeries in her best-selling book, *Men Are Stupid and They Like Big Boobs: A Woman's Guide to Beauty Through Plastic Surgery* (Simon & Schuster, 2008), Joan's just as willing to dish about her new bone-building routine.

No slowing down

Joan is dealing with her osteoporosis the same way she's managed her five-decade-long career—with hard work and tenacity. After graduating from Barnard in 1954, she made a name for herself in the brutally competitive world of standup comedy, forging an irreverent, unconventional style in the early '60s. "I was insanely persistent," she says on her website.

Her 1968 appearance on *The Tonight Show* launched her into the top echelon of the comedy business. Her humor and tenacity have helped her overcome setbacks that would have sidelined a weaker person. These included being blackballed by other late-night talk-show hosts after the Fox network gave her a competing show, *The Late Show with Joan Rivers*, in 1986. That was followed closely by the suicide of her husband, Edgar Rosenberg, in 1987, after the network abruptly cancelled her show, which he helped produce.

A 2010 documentary, *Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work*, explores how she views her long career, and captures her relentless drive and dedication to staying at the top of her game. Recent projects include winning the second season of NBC's *The Celebrity Apprentice*, dozens of standup performances and her autobiographical stage show, *Joan Rivers: A Work in Progress by a Life in Progress*, in London. ▶

In the film, she's constantly on the move, walking, climbing stairs and even carrying her own bags. All this exercise, along with taking medication and supplements, helps to strengthen her bones. Now, Joan says, her bone density is better than it ever was. "It's amazing that I walked away from a fall in the subway. I got up, brushed myself off and kept right on walking."

Health conscious

The daughter of Dr. Meyer Molinsky and his wife, Beatrice, Joan grew up in Larchmont, NY. Being raised by a doctor, Joan knows the importance of having routine health screenings. "I'm very good at having checkups and mammograms, colonoscopies, everything," she says. But it wasn't until she had a complete workup, at the age of 68, that she had her first bone mineral density (BMD) test, a diagnostic tool that measures bone strength and the risk for osteoporosis.

"The doctor called me and said I had osteoporosis and that I was going to end up breaking bones—most likely a hip—and be crippled," she says, recalling the results of that BMD test. "I had no symptoms and felt like I was in perfect health, and here I was being told my condition was life-threatening. I got very upset. I thought my life was going to be over in five years, so I should pack it all in and bubble-wrap myself?"

As she did in her career, Joan took her health into her own hands and made a comeback. She sought a second opinion, which confirmed the original diagnosis. However, the second doctor told her that bone loss actually is reversible. "The first doctor didn't tell me that," says Joan, "he just scared the life out of me."

Joan began having infusions of a drug proven to fight osteoporosis. A year later, she received happier news. "The doctor said not only did we stop the bone loss, but we were turning it around."



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Family first

Despite the demands of her work life, Joan says her "most joyous triumph" is her 10-year-old grandson, Cooper, who lives in Los Angeles with his mother, Melissa, Joan and Edgar's only child. Joan and her daughter have co-hosted many red-carpet fashion shows and collaborate frequently. The two visit Joan often at her sumptuous Manhattan apartment and her country home in New Milford, CT.

The Emmy Award-winner's latest project is a WE television network reality show called *Joan and Melissa: Joan Knows Best*. It follows what happens when Joan moves in for a while with Melissa and Cooper. When the show airs in 2011, Joan hints there will be drama. "My daughter is independent and has her

own life," Joan acknowledges. "She doesn't need her mother asking, 'Why aren't you using placemats and cloth napkins?'" Every woman runs her establishment differently, so it's a lot of fun," she says.

Joan may be a proud grandmother, but she's not ready to sit knitting by the fire. She has no plans to retire. "Who knows where I'll turn up next," she says.

Today, Joan continues to headline at prestigious venues worldwide, including some of Las Vegas' largest rooms. In addition to her standup bookings and the reality show, her calendar is packed with TV specials and interviews. She also promotes her own jewelry, clothing and accessories lines, sold through QVC. And she cranks out a steady stream of updates about all these activities—plus her signature zingers about celebrity foibles—on her Facebook and Twitter feeds!

No bones about it

To stay strong enough to stand up to this kind of stress, Joan continues to take calcium pills and medication. "I'm a terrible eater," she confesses. "I love junk food—it should be its own food group—so I help my bones with supplements and medicine."

Even with this frenetic pace, Joan finds the time to serve as a spokesperson for the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF). She advocates that women—and men—be tested and talk to their healthcare providers about treatment.

She even taped a public-service announcement for the NOF that spoofs her famous red-carpet "fashion police" role. The spot is filmed in virtual x-ray vision, so instead of her usual sharp comments about the stars' plastic surgeries, Joan eyes a young actress closely and quips, "My God, I'd kill for those hip bones—do you think they're real?"

—Gina Roberts-Grey