

Beauty expert Liz Earle on assisting a campaign with the National Osteoporosis Society

BEAUTY expert Liz Earle and her daughter Lily are on a mission to teach young women how to care for their bones.

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Beauty expert Liz Earle and her daughter Lily

Wellbeing and beauty entrepreneur Liz Earle has been in the health business for nearly 30 years, but even she didn't know the horrific damage that young women's faddy diets could cause them in later life.

"Obviously, I've always known that looking after our bones is really important," she says. "But as the mother of two girls, I was shocked to find out that by the end of your twenties, your ability to build calcium in your bones switches off. And if I, as a health writer, didn't realise that our ability to lock calcium away diminishes then shuts off all together, how many other parents and women out there don't know it, either?"

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That's why she agreed to front a campaign run by the National Osteoporosis Society (NOS) called A Message to My Younger Self. Assisting her is her 26-year-old daughter Lily, an ex-primary school teacher who now helps run Liz's Wellbeing magazine. "This is the first time I've been involved with a campaign for the NOS," she says.

"She thought it was for old ladies," says Liz, laughing. Lily nods quietly and adds, "I never realised how important it was as a young woman to be thinking about bone density. It's something you hear about in older women."

Liz agrees. "When you think about osteoporosis, you have a mental image perhaps of someone with a hunchback or shrinking in height in old age with a walking stick. When you're Lily's age, you don't think of issues you are setting up for later life."

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"We tend to take our skeleton for granted, don't we? I suppose because we can't ever see it except on X-rays and it always looks rather cartoonish when it's drawn.

"But it's alarming to think that you can't get to the age of 30 and think, 'Well, I'm going to start eating loads of calcium-rich foods again,' because it's too late. That's why I was prepared to stick my neck out and talk about this. It's a really important conversation to be having."

Diet is key to protecting your bones against osteoporosis, the condition that causes bones to become fragile and break easily. You need plenty of calcium, which comes from dairy products such as milk, yoghurt and cheese.

Yet a survey carried out on behalf of NOS found that 20 per cent of 18 to 35 year olds had significantly reduced their dairy intake or cut it out altogether. And 70 per cent of them were currently on, or had been on, some kind of diet to lose weight.

The survey also showed that the under 25s were more likely than any other age group to be following health, diet and fad-eating regimes promoted on social media. Experts have warned that the current "clean-eating" trend fronted by waif-like glossy young women who exclude whole food groups, often including dairy, could have a negative impact on the future health of this generation's bones.

"So the question is, are we potentially building up a nation of young women who have been avoiding calcium-rich food?" asks Liz, who also has a 16-year-old daughter. "If so, then we are suddenly going to find ourselves with a health time



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bomb in 10, 20 or 30 years' time when they have really brittle and fragile bones.



Mother and daughter are on a mission to teach young women how to care for their bones

"I'm 54 and aware that I have to preserve the calcium I have got and look after my bones by doing weight-bearing exercises, eating well and getting some sunshine. But it's so important to pass that message on to our daughters and granddaughters of what they need to do before it's too late."

Liz set up the Liz Earle Beauty Co with her good friend Kim Buckland in 1995 to plug a gap in the beauty market for mid-priced quality products. The company was sold in 2010 and is now part of the Boots family. She recently announced that she wasn't going to work with the brand any more but she is still passionate about the idea of inner beauty.

"You mustn't forget that we make our own skin from within and we do that by feeding it the right ingredients, which means eating well," she says.

"So beauty has always been a two-way thing and now that I am less involved with the beauty company, it's given me more time to go back to my first passion, which is writing and researching, and getting involved with health campaigns like this."

She understands the pressures young women are under to



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look and eat a certain way. "When I was growing up, my meals weren't photographed and shared on social media. The pressure young women are under to match what their idols on Instagram are eating is really high.



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"Social media has caused a lot of confusion over what is 'healthy' eating, and children and young adults need to get their understanding of nutrition from the real-life experiences of older, wiser voices, not a fashionable food-fad image on a screen."

Liz, who has five children from the ages of seven to 26, spends her time between London, where she makes regular appearances promoting healthy living on ITVs This Morning, writing books, editing her magazine and running the family farm in the West Country. When they all get together at the farm, the family enjoys cooking and eating together.

"Lily has luckily always eaten well and then there is my 16-year-old daughter, who is much more aware than Lily ever was about what she is eating. She sees a lot of Instagram pictures and young foodie bloggers that she follows. In one way, that's what's great about the younger generation - they are so interested in food.

"My youngsters are very keen on learning what they can cook, what's healthy, and going to farmers' markets and finding ingredients at the weekend. I certainly don't remember doing that when I was a teenager."

Over the past few months Liz has been impressing on them just how important it is to get enough calcium in their diets, and not just from milk.



Liz is leading the campaign called A Message to My Younger Self



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"We just have to be eating calcium. Not just in dairy, but in nuts and seeds, and in green leafy veg like kale. I make kale crisps, which are very good. You just rub the leaves with a little bit of olive oil and sea salt then crisp them up in the oven," says Liz, who features healthy recipes on her website (lizearlewellbeing.com).

Lily says, "Mum gives me lots of great advice. But the most important thing is that it's all about balance. Not to be extreme one way or another, but making sure you have a varied diet. Also, restrictive diets are really hard to keep up and not particularly fun."

It isn't just calcium we need in order to guard against the risk of osteoporosis: the body also needs enough vitamin D to help it absorb the calcium. Vitamin D mainly comes from sunlight, so it's important to spend some time with your skin exposed to the sun, something that's easily forgotten in an age of dire warnings about skin cancer.

"I've been talking to a number of fellow health editors and experts who were in their early fifties, like me, and discovered that they were having a lot of fractures and bone problems," reveals Liz.

"I think this is because we've been brought up over the last 20 years to avoid every single glimmer of sunshine because it was going to age the skin.

"I'm somebody who has always tried to protect my face and neck but I've never been rigorous about keeping my arms and legs out of the sun because I think a little bit of a tan, if you are very pale like me, makes you look a bit healthier.

She follows the experts' advice to expose some skin – forearms and face are enough – for 20 minutes a day between March and October.

"I put a strong mineral block on the backs of my hands and my face and upper chest, and let the rest of my skin get a bit of sun – not covering up all the time and fearing every sunbeam."

She says she is lucky that her daughters talk to her all the time about what makes up a healthy lifestyle.

Liz looks proudly over at her eldest daughter and says, "I am fortunate I am able to influence my own family. But I was suddenly thinking, 'What about all the other girls out there who are not listening to the right messages?' That's why this campaign is so important."

Osteoporosis: the facts

I This fragile bone condition causes painful, debilitating and sometimes fatal fractures, particularly of the wrist, hip and spine.

I One in two women and one in five men over the age of 50 will break a bone, mainly because of poor bone health.

I Osteoporosis is very common. Almost three million people in the UK have the disease and there are roughly 300,000 fractures a year.

I Foods that are rich in calcium and vitamin D include most dairy products, green leafy veg, salmon, sardines, broccoli and baked beans.

I Vitamin D can also come from the sunlight and it is important to spend some time with skin exposed to sun.

For more information, visit nos.org.uk.

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