

Taking Charge of Osteoporosis

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A Guide for Patients Understanding Osteoporosis

Understanding Osteoporosis

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to become thin, weak, and brittle. Women and men with osteoporosis are at greater risk for bone fractures, especially of the hip, spine, ribs, and wrist. These fractures can be very severe, leading to loss of independence, back pain, and a stooped appearance.

What are the symptoms of osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a “silent” disease, without symptoms until a fracture occurs. The only way to know for certain that you have osteoporosis is to speak with your doctor. Your doctor will work with you to review your risk factors and, if appropriate, have you take a bone mineral density (BMD) test. This test is safe and painless. Check with your physician to see if a BMD test is right for you.

Who is at risk for osteoporosis?

Both women and men, regardless of their age, can develop osteoporosis. Risk does increase with age, with post-menopausal white women being at greatest risk. A woman may lose up to one-third of the bone mass in her spine within the first six years after menopause. Other risk factors include a history of a bone fracture, thin or small-framed build, a family history of osteoporosis, a diet low in calcium, use of certain medications and some illnesses, an inactive lifestyle, smoking, and heavy alcohol use. Although osteoporosis affects women more often than men, it is important that men are aware of their risk of developing the disease and take caution in protecting their bones.

Are you at risk? Take this helpful quiz to learn more about risk factors:

www.betterbones.com/at_risk/questionnaire.htm

Can osteoporosis be treated?

Yes. Osteoporosis can be prevented and treated using a combination of diet, exercise and, when appropriate, prescription medications.

Healthy Living with Osteoporosis

You can help slow bone loss and strengthen your bones by maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Exercise. Bones become stronger and denser when you place demands on them. Strength training, such as weight-lifting, helps you build the muscles and bones in your arms and upper spine. Weight-bearing exercise, such as walking, jogging, running, and stair climbing, helps the bones in your legs, hips and lower spine. Exercise can also improve balance and reduce the risk of falls.

Get enough calcium and vitamin D. Calcium plays an important role in keeping bones healthy. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium. Good sources of calcium include milk, low-fat plain yogurt, cheese, broccoli, canned salmon, calcium-fortified orange juice and calcium-fortified tofu. Ask your doctor how much calcium your body needs. If you find it hard to get enough calcium from your diet, your doctor may suggest calcium supplements. The major food sources of vitamin D are vitamin D-fortified dairy products, egg yolks, saltwater fish and liver. Some calcium supplements and most multivitamins contain vitamin D. Your diet should also be generally nutritious with adequate amounts of protein and limited salt.

Don't smoke. Smoking speeds bone loss.

Avoid drinking too much alcohol. Having more than two alcoholic drinks a day may cut bone formation and the body's ability to absorb calcium.

Limit caffeine. Excess caffeine contributes to bone breakdown.

Prevent falls. Remove trip hazards from your home, install handrails, and be sure that your home has enough light.

Take medications as directed. If your doctor prescribes a drug as part of your treatment, carefully follow the directions for taking it. This will reduce any side effects you may experience and ensure that your body is getting the help it needs to build healthy bones.

Talking to Your Doctor About Osteoporosis

Tell your doctor about...

- Any fractures you have had, especially if they were not the result of a severe accident.
- Medications (including vitamins and over the counter medications) you're currently taking
- Your lifestyle (exercise, smoking, alcohol use, etc.)
- Your concerns about how osteoporosis could affect your life
- Your family medical history, especially concerning fractures and osteoporosis
- Concerns or problems you may have with any aspect of your osteoporosis treatment
- Any side effects or difficulties you may have related to taking your osteoporosis medication

Ask your doctor about...

- How osteoporosis could impact your lifestyle
- How changing your lifestyle can prevent bone thinning
- How to get enough calcium and vitamin D
- What exercises can help your condition
- How to prevent falls in your home
- How osteoporosis treatment can help your condition
- If osteoporosis medication is appropriate for you

For More Information

Surgeon General's Report
(866) 718-BONE (2663)
www.surgeongeneral.gov

Alliance for Aging Research
(800) 639-2421
info@agingresearch.org
www.agingresearch.org

Foundation for Osteoporosis Research and Education
(888) 266-3015
info@fore.org
www.fore.org

International Osteoporosis Foundation
info@osteofound.org
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National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal
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National Institutes of Health
(877) 22-NIAMS
(301) 565-2966 (TTY)
niamsinfo@mail.nih.gov
www.niams.nih.gov

National Osteoporosis Foundation
(202) 223.2226
www.nof.org

Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases,
National Resource Center
National Institutes of Health
(800) 624-BONE
(202) 466-4315 (TTY)
niamsboneinfo@mail.nih.gov
www.osteoporosis.org

Osteoporosis Education Project
info@betterbones.com
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Osteoporosis Society of Canada
(800) 463-6842
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