

Osteoporosis

Facts for Older Adults



RAND



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Osteoporosis

A preventable and treatable disease

What is osteoporosis?

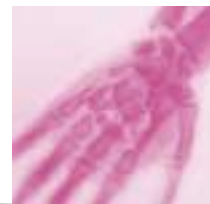
Osteoporosis is a disease in which the bones thin and lose strength, often without any outward signs or symptoms. The majority of people with osteoporosis don't even know that they have this condition.

People with osteoporosis are more likely to fracture a bone. Bones can become so weak that a sudden bump or fall can cause a fracture. Osteoporosis affects all bones, but fractures occur most commonly at the wrist, hip, and spine.



How serious is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a major health concern, and a leading cause of disability and death in older adults. It is responsible for about 1.5 million fractures each year. Among older adults who fracture a hip due to osteoporosis, up to half are unable to live independently again, and 1 in 5 will die within one year.



Who can get osteoporosis?

Anyone can get osteoporosis, but it is more common in women beyond age 50. At age 50, the lifetime risk of having an osteoporotic fracture is about 54% for women and 13% for men. The risk of a fracture increases with age.

Risk factors increase your chances of developing osteoporosis. Some risk factors, such as race, age, gender, and family history, cannot be changed. Other factors, such as smoking, a diet low in calcium, and lack of physical activity, can be changed to help reduce your risk of developing osteoporosis.

There are also certain medications, especially cortisone, that can cause bone loss.



How do you know if you have osteoporosis?

Unfortunately, the first sign of osteoporosis may be a bone fracture. For some people the first sign is that they are getting shorter. The best way to diagnose osteoporosis before you fracture a bone is by an x-ray test that measures the bone density. The most commonly used test is called a DEXA. It takes less than 10 minutes. Once diagnosed, treatment is available to slow the progression of the disease.



Facts About Osteoporosis You Can Use

Prevention is the best medicine

Stopping smoking reduces bone loss

If you smoke, talk to your doctor about ways to help you quit.

Moderate exercise can reduce bone loss and the risk of falling

Exercise of moderate intensity slows bone loss among postmenopausal women. Exercises need to be weight bearing in order to strengthen the bones. Exercises that do this include brisk walking and moderate jogging. Exercises that improve balance or strength reduce the risk of falling.



Stronger bones and fewer falls reduce the risk of fracture. Women 65 years of age and older who walk regularly for exercise have a 30% lower risk of hip fracture due to osteoporosis than women who do not walk regularly.



Calcium supplements and Vitamin D can help slow bone loss

The main source of dietary calcium is dairy products – milk, yogurt, and cheese. Other sources of dietary calcium are vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, and brussels sprouts. Salmon is also a good source of calcium. But if your daily diet does not provide you with enough calcium, supplements can help. Most women over age 65 should consume 1500 mg of elemental calcium each day. Vitamin D works with calcium to maintain strong bones. Calcium supplements and vitamin D slow bone loss in postmenopausal women and elderly men.



Drug therapy can prevent and treat osteoporosis

There are several different types of medications that are useful for the treatment of osteoporosis. These medications have different beneficial effects and side effects. Your doctor can tell you if you need a medicine for osteoporosis and, if so, which medication is best for you. Medications useful in the treatment of osteoporosis are:

- Hormone replacement therapy
- Selective estrogen receptor modulators (SERMs)
- Bisphosphonates
- Calcitonin

 U.S. Pharmaceuticals

P0003029M
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Printed in USA
April 2001

Design: Pfizer Graphics, NY