

Osteoporosis

What is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that weakens bones. As this disease progresses, the bones may become so brittle they break even without an injury. These broken bones, or fractures, usually occur in the hip, spine or wrist. However, any bone can be affected and can result in disabilities and even death.

Osteoporosis is often known as the “silent disease” because the weakening of the bones occurs without the person knowing it. Because there’s no cure for osteoporosis, it’s important to keep your bones strong.

Risk Factors?

What are the risks of developing osteoporosis and who is at risk?

- Post menopausal women;
- Those with a family history of the disease;
- Small body frame;
- A diet low in calcium;
- Low testosterone levels in men;
- Smoking;
- Alcohol;
- Inactivity with decreased weight bearing; and
- Advanced age.

Prevention Includes Calcium

By age 20, both men and women have developed maximum bone strength, so children and teens should develop strong bones at an early age. This requires a balanced diet high in calcium and vitamin D; daily exercise; and not smoking or drinking alcohol. Persons 19-50 years of age should get 1,000 mg of calcium per day; persons older than 50 should have an intake of 1,200 mg daily. Unfortunately, the average American gets less than 800 mg daily.

The following foods are good sources of dietary calcium: low-fat milk; cheese; broccoli; and foods with added calcium, such as orange juice, breakfast bars and cereals. Non-fat dry milk added to casseroles, breads, muffins, soups, pudding, cocoa, cookies and gravy is a good way to increase dietary calcium.

Keep in mind that vitamin D is needed to absorb calcium. Normally, the skin through exposure to sunlight, manufactures vitamin D. For those with limited exposure to sunlight, dietary intake of vitamin D will need to be increased. Dairy products, saltwater fish, egg yolks and liver are the best natural sources for vitamin D, although many foods have vitamin D added.

The purpose of this patient education handout is to further explain or remind you about a medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your health care provider. This handout may be reproduced for distribution to patients.

Daily weight-bearing exercise is essential to keep bones strong and to decrease the risk of a fracture. Just walking for 20-30 minutes a day can achieve this. Other weight-bearing exercises include stair climbing, dancing, jogging, racquet sports and hiking. Older individuals should consult their health care provider before beginning any exercise program.

Over-the-Counter Calcium

If you can’t get enough calcium from food, calcium supplements are available without a prescription in a wide range of strengths and preparations. Your pharmacist can help you choose the supplement that best meets your needs and can alert you to any food or drug interactions.



Chewable and liquid forms of calcium are the best because they allow faster absorption in the stomach. It is best to take calcium supplements in small doses, 500 mg or less, several times a day (maximum dose 1,200-1,500 mg per day for an adult) to decrease irritation that may occur in the stomach. Reading the labels of over-the-counter vitamins is also important, as many are enriched with vitamin D, which will help with the absorption of the calcium supplement that you choose.

Prescribed Medications

As osteoporosis worsens, your physician may prescribe medications that prevent and/or treat osteoporosis. Currently, five drugs have been approved by the FDA for this purpose. To find out if you might benefit from taking one of these medications, ask your doctor. ■

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