

## Tips for Preventing Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition where bones become thin and brittle. This makes it easier for the bones to break or fracture. Women are four times more likely to develop osteoporosis than men. Due to the rarer occurrence, a diagnosis of osteoporosis may be missed or delayed in men.

### Are You at Risk for Osteoporosis?

There are many factors that determine who will develop osteoporosis. Knowing these risk factors can help you understand the likelihood of developing the disease and how to make lifestyle changes necessary to prevent osteoporosis.

The following are common risk factors for developing osteoporosis:

- **Age.** The older you are, the greater your risk.
- **Gender.** Women have less bone tissue and lose bone more rapidly than men.
- **Family History.** It is believed that heredity plays a part. If there is a family history of osteoporosis, or a parent with a spine or hip fracture, there is increased risk.
- **Race.** Evidence shows that Caucasian and Asian women are more likely to have fractures and develop osteoporosis.
- **Bone Structure, Body Weight.** Small-boned and thin women (under 127 pounds) are at greater risk.
- **Early Menopause** Women who go through an early menopause (before age 40) are at increased risk of developing osteoporosis.
- **Medications and Chronic Diseases.** The use of certain medications to treat chronic medical conditions like steroid medications or thyroid medicines can cause loss of bone and lead to osteoporosis.

### Can Osteoporosis Be Prevented?

There are many things that can be done to minimize the risk for developing osteoporosis and the related chance of fractures. It is never too early or too late to start preventive actions.

- **Calcium.** Most people do not get enough calcium in their diet. National surveys have estimated that women and young girls get less than half the amount of the recommended 1000 to 1500 mg of calcium daily.
  - **Foods.** The best way to get this amount is to have three servings of low-fat milk or cheese each day. If you have difficulty digesting milk products, those that have added digestive enzymes (Lactaid) or are 'cultured' (yogurt, buttermilk) can make it easier to get calcium-rich foods. Soy milk (or soy bean products such as tofu) can provide comparable amounts of calcium. Some foods, like orange juice, are now fortified with calcium. Other foods, such as green vegetables and almonds, have smaller amounts of calcium, but are still good sources.
  - **Supplements.** Many people choose to take a calcium supplement because they are not able to get enough calcium through their diet. The best types are calcium citrate and calcium carbonate.

- **Vitamin D.** Vitamin D helps calcium enter the bloodstream to be used as needed for bone strength and other body functions. It is very important to get the recommended daily allowance of vitamin D (400 – 800 IU). It can be easy to get by spending just ten minutes in the sunshine, or by eating foods rich in vitamin D, like fortified dairy products. Recent research suggests that vitamin D in the form of cholecalciferol (D3) is more easily used by the body than ergocalciferol (D2), so choose D3 when possible.
- **Physical Activity.** Bone, like muscle, is living tissue that becomes stronger with exercise. The best kind of exercise is one that you enjoy and can do on a regular basis.
  - **Weight-bearing exercise** is important for building and maintaining bone. Walking, dancing, jogging, stair-climbing, and hiking are excellent because these are exercises where bones and muscles are working together against gravity.
  - **Resistance exercises** are another type of activity that strengthens bones. Examples of resistance include weight lifting and isometrics (using muscle groups to push or pull against other parts of the body, e.g. pushing hands against each other).

Most physical activity combines both types, so an active lifestyle helps improve both bone strength and mass!

- **Stop Smoking-** Smoking reduces bone strength. If you smoke, try to quit. If you need help to quit, call the Hill Physicians' Member Health Improvement Department **877-493-5563** or **health@hpmg.com** for contact information on support services in your area.
- **Make Some Dietary Changes.** Caffeine, salt, and alcohol can reduce bone strength because they interfere with the work of calcium in the body.
  - **Limit Caffeine** to no more than 3 caffeinated beverages (coffee, soda) a day.
  - **Limit Salt.** Leave the salt shaker off the dinner table or cook with less salt.
  - **Limit alcohol intake** to no more than one alcoholic beverage a day.

### Medications for Prevention and Treatment

Several prescription medications have been used to treat or prevent osteoporosis. While many of these have been found to be helpful, some may have unwanted side effects. It is best to discuss the value and risks of using these with your primary care physician or gynecologist.

### Bone Testing for Osteoporosis

The only test that can diagnose osteoporosis is a bone mineral density (BMD) test. By measuring bone mass, this test can help your doctor decide if a medication would be beneficial in preventing further bone loss and reducing the chance of a fracture. Early diagnosis is key and the test, similar to an x-ray, is accurate, painless, and noninvasive (no incisions are made). If you are over 50 and not taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT), talk to your doctor about whether you should be tested.

### Resources

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You may also find useful information through the **National Osteoporosis Foundation**.

Call **(202) 223-2226** or visit <http://www.nof.org/osteoporosis> (includes risk factor questionnaire).

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