

# OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis is a condition in which bones lose density, making them prone to breaking.

One in 2 women and up to 1 in 4 men over age of 50 will break a bone because of osteoporosis, which contributes to an estimated 2 million broken bones every year, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

## CAUSES

A person's body tends to build bone mass until about age 30. After that, bone density begins to decrease. The body begins to absorb small amounts of bone over time. Osteoporosis occurs when bone is absorbed too quickly or is replaced too slowly. If there isn't enough calcium available for the body to replace bone, weaknesses develop. The bones become thin, brittle and honeycombed with small holes. The bones in the hips, spine and wrist are particularly prone to fracturing because of osteoporosis.

A variety of medical conditions and medicinal side effects can contribute to osteoporosis. The American Academy of Orthopaedic Physicians identifies these common risk factors:

- Aging.
- Physical inactivity.
- Reduced estrogen levels.
- Heredity.
- Excessive cortisone or thyroid hormone.
- Smoking.
- Excessive alcohol intake.

## SYMPTOMS

An estimated 54 million Americans have low bone density, but it's likely that few of them know it. Osteoporosis is known as a silent disease because it has no symptoms. Typically, the first time a person realizes that he or she has osteoporosis is after a bone breaks.

## DIAGNOSIS

If you are at risk for osteoporosis, your doctor might recommend a bone mineral density test, which assesses bone health. The test, similar to having an X-ray, measures bone density in the hip and spine. It can help your doctor predict how likely you are to break a bone and find out how quickly you are losing bone density. If you are being treated for osteoporosis, the test can assess how well the treatment is working.

## TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

Those at risk for osteoporosis can control some of the factors in the development of the disease. While these steps won't stop the loss of bone density, they can slow the process and make serious injury less likely.

- Quit smoking.
- Limit your alcohol intake to two to three drinks daily.
- Participate in weight-bearing exercise such as walking or dancing three to four hours each week.

- Make sure to get enough calcium in your diet. Leafy green vegetables and dairy products are excellent sources. (For those 51 to 70, it's recommended that men get 1,000 milligrams of calcium a day, and that women get 1,200 milligrams.)
- Make sure to get enough Vitamin D through supplements or exposure to sunlight. (Those 51 to 70 should get 600 International Units daily.)
- Your doctor might recommend medication, hormone therapy or estrogen therapy.

**National Osteoporosis Foundation**  
[www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)

**National Institutes of Health**  
[www.niams.nih.gov/health\\_info/bone/osteoporosis](http://www.niams.nih.gov/health_info/bone/osteoporosis)

## **PREVENTING FALLS**

It's crucial for those with osteoporosis to do everything they can to avoid falling, since a fall can fracture bones. The National Osteoporosis Foundation offers many tips to help prevent falls, including:

- Wear low-heeled shoes with rubber soles for more traction.
- Use handrails on stairs and escalators.
- Watch out for slippery floors, especially those made of marble, in public buildings.
- Keep your porch, deck, walkways and driveway in good repair and free of leaves, snow, trash and clutter.
- Stop at curbs and check the height before stepping up or down.
- Remove loose wires, cords and area rugs from floors in the home.
- Install grab bars near the tub, shower and toilet.

## **RESOURCES**

UK HealthCare specialists and fellowship-trained professionals are world-renowned for developing and implementing state-of-the-art techniques to diagnose and treat bone disorders.

[ukhealthcare.uky.edu/Ortho](http://ukhealthcare.uky.edu/Ortho)