

Osteoporosis & You

What is it?



Osteoporosis is a bone disease that causes loss of bone strength and increases the risk of fractures. This occurs most commonly in the hips and spine.

There are many causes of osteoporosis. One key factor that affects a person's risk of developing the disease is how much bone mass their body makes early in life. Environmental influences such as malnutrition, low physical activity, chronic steroid use, smoking and high alcohol intake can influence bone mass.

There are also several factors that affect how much bone mass we lose over time. Sex steroids such as estrogen and testosterone are important for maintaining the strength of bone. Excessive steroid hormone and vitamin D deficiency can also increase the rate of bone loss.

Osteoporosis most commonly affects postmenopausal women. But it can also affect men as they age because bone strength decreases over time. Osteoporosis can also affect people who have used steroid medications for a long time without protective strategies.

What is it going to do to me?



Osteoporosis can be a silent disease with no symptoms. Often, it may not be diagnosed until a person suffers a fragility fracture.

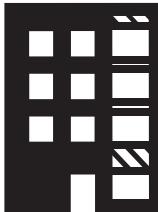
This is a fracture that results from a fall from standing height. The most common locations for fragility fractures are the wrist, hip and spine. Fractures of the vertebrae (spine) are most common. People with a vertebral fracture often have back pain.

Sometimes there might be loss of height. This can result in a hump-back appearance. Some people may also feel like they are gaining weight as the excess abdominal fat moves to the front of their body. The hunching over can also result in the ribs rubbing on the pelvis, which can be painful.

Visit RheumInfo.com



RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about osteoporosis and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.



Your skeleton is like a cement building

You can think of your body as a cement office building, with your bones being the framing and calcium as the cement. Without a strong frame the whole thing would crumble. In osteoporosis, the body loses bone structure and the frame becomes porous. A weak frame can eventually develop tiny cracks, potentially leading to bone fractures.

What can I do about it?



Osteoporosis can be a serious disease and it is important to seek treatment. If you have osteoporosis or think you may have it, visit your family doctor. You may be referred to a specialty osteoporosis clinic if there is one in your area.

If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis, the first thing is to make sure you are getting appropriate amounts of calcium and vitamin D every day (talk to your doctor). If you are not getting enough calcium and vitamin D from your diet, your doctor may recommend a supplement.

Whether you need to take medication for osteoporosis will depend on your risk of fracture over the next 10 years.

- **Low risk (less than 1 in 10 chance of a fracture in the next 10 years), no medications are required.**
- **Moderate risk (1 to 2 in 10 chance), medication may be recommended.**
- **High risk (more than 2 in 10 chance or previous fragility fracture), medication will probably be prescribed.**

No matter what your risk of fracture, exercise and smoking cessation are important elements of reducing your risk of fracture.

Here are some other recommendations:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Attend your medical appointments regularly**
- **Exercise regularly, especially weight-bearing exercise**
- **Learn about the medications used to treat osteoporosis**