

Osteoporosis

What is osteoporosis?

- Osteoporosis is when the bones become thin and brittle, weakening them and increasing the risk that they will break.
- Your bones are still forming until you reach your mid 30's. This means that building healthy bones when you are young can help prevent problems when you get older.
- Statistics show that 25 million Americans suffer from osteoporosis.
- 1.2 million fractures occur every year because of osteoporosis. These fractures can lead to pain, disability, and even death.

What are the symptoms?

- There are usually no symptoms of osteoporosis until a bone breaks. Once the bone breaks, pain and tenderness may be felt over the broken bone.
- If bones of the spine break, your height may decrease and you may have a curve in the upper back. This happens because the weight of your body causes the brittle bones of your spine to collapse.

Who is at risk?

- Women have a smaller bone mass than men. This means they are at greater risk of osteoporosis than men.
- Other risk factors include:
 - Caucasian or Asian race
 - smoking, alcohol, and drugs
 - family history of osteoporosis
 - certain medicines such as steroids
 - lack of exercise
 - slender frame
 - menopause
 - low calcium diet
 - anorexia
 - removing the ovaries (often done during a hysterectomy)

Osteoporosis and estrogen. . .

- Estrogen is a hormone produced by the ovaries before menopause. It helps to keep bone mass.
- Near the time of menopause, or when the ovaries are surgically removed during a hysterectomy, a woman's level of estrogen decreases. This leads to rapid bone loss, which can put a woman at risk for osteoporosis.

How can I prevent osteoporosis?

- The more bone you build when you are young, the less risk you have for osteoporosis.

- A healthy diet rich in calcium and plenty of weight bearing exercise (walking) throughout your life can help prevent osteoporosis. Calcium can be found in foods such as milk, cheese, or orange juice with calcium added.
- Hormone replacement therapy at the time of menopause or after surgical removal of the ovaries can help keep bone mass and prevent osteoporosis.

How can osteoporosis be detected?

- You should have a complete physical exam every year where your height is measured.
- A bone density test can be done by x-ray, but is usually used only if you are at high risk of developing osteoporosis, or you already have osteoporosis and your doctor wants to monitor your progress. Ask your doctor for more information.

How can osteoporosis be treated?

- The main treatment of osteoporosis is to prevent falls, which can lead to broken bones. This includes making sure your home is safe, with well-lit rooms, skid-proof rugs, and handrails.
- You should avoid lifting, bending, and twisting, and try to maintain good posture.
- Make sure you take in enough calcium even after osteoporosis develops. You can discuss your calcium intake with your doctor or a nutritionist.
- Hormone replacement therapy not only can reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis; it can reduce your risk of fractures and prevent further bone loss.
- Certain medicines may be prescribed by your doctor to help slow the breakdown of your bones. Some of these medicines can also help ease the pain of broken bones. Ask your doctor for more information.