

Osteoporosis: The Brittle Truth

What Is It?

Osteoporosis is a bone disease in which bones become weak and susceptible to fracture. It is called a “silent disease” because you cannot feel or see your bones becoming thinner over time. Unfortunately, many people are diagnosed with osteoporosis only after a painful fracture has occurred.

Who Is at Risk for Osteoporosis?

All older adults are at risk. Certain individuals have factors that can increase their chance of developing the disease. Persons at higher risk include:

- Women especially those who are small-boned and thin
- Those with a family history of osteoporosis, including fractures in either the father or mother
- Caucasians and Asian-Americans
- Smokers
- Those who do not exercise regularly
- Women who have early menopause
- Those who do not get enough calcium and vitamin D

In addition to these risks, certain diseases and medications can lead to osteoporosis.

How Can I Be Tested for Osteoporosis?

For some patients, the diagnosis can be made based on review of their medical history and physical examination. In others, a Bone Density test can be helpful. Your physician can help determine what is required for you.

How Can I Prevent Osteoporosis?

To prevent osteoporosis, everyone should:

- Remain physically active and participate in weight-bearing (walking, dancing) and resistance (free weights) exercises
- Take 1200 mg/day of calcium
- Take 400 to 800 IU/day of vitamin D
- Avoid tobacco
- Limit alcohol intake
- Prevent falls

Prevention for some high-risk individuals includes:

- Hormone replacement
- Medications

What Treatments Are Available?

A number of effective medicines can actually rebuild bone in persons with osteoporosis. If you have osteoporosis, your doctor will talk to you about these drugs.

***Disclaimer:** This information is not intended as a substitute for professional care. Your physician should be consulted for personalized information.*