

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease that weakens bones to the point where they break easily. Osteoporosis (also called “thin bone disease”) is often called a “silent disease” because you may not notice any changes until a bone breaks. But your bones may have been losing strength for many years. Half of all women will break a bone from osteoporosis.

What Is Osteoporosis? Bone is living tissue. To keep bones strong, your body is always breaking down old bone and replacing it with new bone tissue. As people enter their forties and fifties, more bone is broken down than is replaced. As bones become weaker, it is easier to break (fracture) them. This is especially true for the hip, wrist, or spine. Many small fractures in the spine can cause the back to bend permanently forward.

How Can I Tell If I Have “Thin Bones”? You cannot feel your bones growing weaker because they do not hurt. The only sign may be that you are getting shorter. You may not even know you have a problem until you fracture a bone.

The best way to tell if your bones are thinning is to have a bone density test. The most common type of bone mineral density (BMD) test is called a DEXA-scan (using dual-energy X-rays). This test measures the bone density of your hip and spine. The Medicare program covers this test every two years after age 65.

Your doctor will help you to understand your BMD test scores. He or she will also tell you what steps you can take to reduce your risk of bone fractures.

How Do I Keep My Bones Strong? You can help keep your bones strong through diet, exercise, and healthy habits.

- **Calcium:** Getting enough calcium throughout your life helps to build and keep strong bones. Foods that are high in calcium are the best source. For example, eat low-fat dairy foods, canned fish with soft bones such as salmon, dark green leafy vegetables, and calcium-fortified foods like orange juice, breads, and cereals.
- **Vitamin D:** Your body uses vitamin D to absorb calcium from what you eat.

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How Do I Keep My Bones Strong? You can also get vitamin D from eggs, fatty fish, and cereal and milk fortified with vitamin D.

Strong?
(Continued)

- **Exercise:** Your bones and muscles will be stronger if you are physically active. Weight-bearing exercises, such as walking or water aerobics are best for keeping your bones strong.
- **Lifestyle:** Smoking causes bone loss (and many other health problems), and you should stop. Too much alcohol (more than one drink a day for women and two for men) also causes bone loss.

What Treatments Are Available? Medical treatment can increase bone density and reduce your fracture risk. Your doctor will recommend a specific treatment and monitor your progress. Available treatments include:

- **Hormone Therapy:** Your doctor may prescribe different hormones to reduce bone loss and help build bone strength.
- **Drug Treatment:** Your doctor may prescribe other medicines to help slow down loss of bone and increase your bone strength. These medicines are dramatically effective in strengthening bones and preventing fractures.

How Do I Know If I Am At Risk for Osteoporosis? Certain facts about you and your health can increase your chances of osteoporosis. These facts are called “risk factors.” Age is the most important single risk factor, with your risk increasing every year you live.

Half of women and one in four men over 50 have low bone density. Men who are very old or have risk factors (listed below) are also at risk.

Answer the questions in the **Osteoporosis Questionnaire** in the next page to see if you have other risk factors.

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Osteoporosis Questionnaire		
Question	Circle Y/N	
1. Are you female?	Y	N
2. Do you have a thin or small frame?	Y	N
3. Are you White or Asian?	Y	N
4. Has any close relative been diagnosed with Osteoporosis?	Y	N
5. Do you have an inactive lifestyle (no regular exercise)?	Y	N
6. Do you smoke cigarettes?	Y	N
7. Are you a heavy alcohol drinker?	Y	N
8. Did you have an early menopause?	Y	N
9. Do you have any known past fractures (broken bones)?	Y	N
10. Do you not drink milk or have a low calcium intake?	Y	N
11. Are you male and over 80?	Y	N
Total		<u> </u> <u> </u>
<p><i>If you are female and over 65 or if you answer “yes” to some of these questions, talk with your doctor about a bone density test.</i></p>		

Resources Organizations

Osteoporosis Canada

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*Toll Free information line is available in both official languages:
 1-800-463-6842 (English) and 1-800-977-1778 (French)*

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