

OSTEOPOROSIS: The Facts You Need To Know

WHAT IS OSTEOPOROSIS?

Osteoporosis is a debilitating disease in which bones become fragile and are more likely to break. In most cases, it can be prevented and treated, but if steps are not taken it progresses painlessly until a bone breaks.

Osteoporosis affects more than 28 million Americans, 80% of whom are women. In the United States today, 10 million already have osteoporosis and 18 million more have low bone mass placing them at increased risk for developing this disease.

The consequences of osteoporosis are devastating. Each year in the United States this disease leads to a million and a half fractures, mostly of the hip, spine and wrist, although any bone can be affected. Low bone density can be identified, and appropriate steps can be taken before osteoporosis can be taken before osteoporosis and fractures occur.

ARE YOU AT RISK?

Several factors can increase your chances of developing:

- **Gender:** Women are more likely to develop osteoporosis than men due to thinner, lighter bones and the decrease estrogen production that occurs during menopause.
- **Age:** The longer you live, the greater the likelihood of developing osteoporosis. Although all of us lose bone tissue as we age, the amount and rate of loss varies widely with each individual.
- **Family History:** Susceptibility to osteoporosis is due in part to heredity. If you have had a fracture as an adult or a parent has had a fracture, you are more likely to have low bone mass than your peers.
- **Ethnicity:** Caucasian and Asian women are at highest risk; African-American and Hispanic women are at lower but significant risk.
- **Body Size:** Low body weight (under 127 lbs) and a small- boned frame place you at increased risk.
- **Lifestyle:** A diet low in calcium, inadequate vitamin D, little or no exercise, current cigarette smoking or excessive use of alcohol are all risk factors for this debilitating disease.

DIAGNOSING OSTEOPOROSIS

To determine if you have osteoporosis or may be at risk for the disease, your doctor will ask you questions about your life-style, medical history and whether anyone in your family has suffered from osteoporosis or if they have fractured any bones. Specialized tests, called bone density tests, can measure the bone density in various sites of the body. A bone density test can detect osteoporosis before a fracture occurs, predict your chances of fracturing in the future and determine your rate of bone loss. Many are able to monitor a person's response to treatment if they are conducted at intervals of a year or more.

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