

# What you need to know: Osteoporosis

## What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a condition characterized by the loss of normal bone density, resulting in fragile bone. The result of this illness is an increase in the risk of breaking bones (bone fracture).

Patients with osteoporosis can break a bone with a relatively minor incident, such as lifting a gallon of milk or sneezing hard. The truth about osteoporotic fractures of the spine is that 60% of spine (vertebral) fractures occur without the patient knowing that anything has happened.

## Osteoporosis Facts

The National Osteoporosis Foundation has estimated that more than 10 million Americans have osteoporosis, 20% of whom are men. About one out of every two white women will have an osteoporosis-related fracture at some time in her life. Osteoporosis is found less often in the African-American population, but those with osteoporosis have the same fracture risk as white women. Men are at risk for developing osteoporosis, but later in life.

## What are the symptoms?

Similar to high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol, osteoporosis has no symptoms. “Symptoms” of osteoporosis are actually due to the pain associated with a fracture. If these fractures occur in the spine, progressive deforming curvature can develop, which can compromise the function of vital organs.

Life threatening complications of fractures are the development of pneumonia, pressure ulcers, blood clots and heart attacks.



## How is osteoporosis diagnosed?

The best tool for diagnosing osteoporosis is a bone density measurement or BMD. The National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends getting a BMD if you're a woman past menopause with at least one risk factor. All women over age 65 and men over 70 should get a scan regardless of risk factors.

## What are the risk factors for developing osteoporosis?

- Being post-menopausal i.e., low sex hormone levels in men or women
- History of low-impact fractures among immediate family members
- Thin build
- Chronic medical illness, such as rheumatoid arthritis or inflammatory bowel disease
- Smoking
- Use of oral corticosteroids (prednisone) for more than three months
- Low lifetime calcium intake and/or low vitamin D
- Not enough physical activity
- Excessive alcohol consumption (more than two drinks per day)
- Age 65 or over

## What are my treatment options if I'm diagnosed?

Your doctor may prescribe medication or decide to treat your osteoporosis with calcium and vitamin D supplements and moderate exercise.



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