

OSTEOPOROSIS: The SILENT Thief

osteoporosis *n.* A skeletal disease characterized by increased thinness and fragility of bone structure due to a loss of bone density.

So what does that mean?

Osteoporosis occurs when the rate that calcium is taken out of the bone by the body is greater than the rate that calcium is put into the bone. This means that the bone becomes less compact and thick, and thus, weaker, since the minerals it needs to make it strong are being depleted. If the bone structure deteriorates enough to cause fracture or injury, the condition is known as osteoporosis.

OK, but how severe is the problem?

It is a VERY substantial problem.

Major health risk for **44 million Americans**
10 million diagnosed
34 million at greatly increased risk
55% over age 50 have low bone mass
80% affected are women
20% affected are men
1 in 3 over age 50 will sustain a related fracture
causes 1.5 million fractures a year
costs the nation \$47 million a day, \$17 billion a year

You are at risk if you:

- currently smoke cigarettes
- use alcohol excessively
- lead an inactive lifestyle
- have a history of anorexia nervosa
- have a family history of osteoporosis
- are thin and/or have a small frame
- have an abnormal absence of menstrual periods
- currently have low bone mass
- have had a low lifetime intake of calcium
- are estrogen deficient due to menopause
- are female
- are male with low testosterone levels
- use certain medications, like corticosteroids or anticonvulsants

- are elderly
- have a personal history of fracture after age 50

So, do you have osteoporosis?

Because the disease often occurs without symptoms, it is difficult to diagnose without a medical test. However, there are a few signs that could mean you do have it:

- severe back pain
- loss of height
- spinal deformities
- severely stooped posture
- recurrent bone fractures
- low bone density in both spine and hip (only found with medical test)

How can I prevent it?!!

Here's the good news – osteoporosis can definitely be prevented from becoming a substantial health risk! The first step is to be proactive... that is, to take responsibility in your actions for caring for yourself and your bones. You will notice that the behaviors that can prevent osteoporosis can also prevent other conditions that are also a serious health risk. No one but you can prevent this silent thief.

**Main prevention goal:
BUILD STRONG BONES INTO YOUNG ADULthood
CONTINUE BUILDING BONES AS YOU AGE**

Maintain an adequate intake of calcium throughout life.

- Both men and women, ages 9 +, **1200-1500 mg per day**
- For foods high in calcium, see **Table 1.1**, or visit on the web the National Institute of Child Health and Development for a great list of calcium rich foods.
<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/milk>

Quit Smoking!

- Not only does smoking seriously affect your heart and lungs, but smokers absorb less calcium from their diets than do nonsmokers! Not good for preventing osteoporosis.

Cut Back on Alcohol Consumption

- The skeleton may be damaged by regular consumption of as little as 2 to 3 ounces of alcohol a day.

Eat a Balanced and Proper Diet

- A nutritious, balanced diet will naturally be filled with calcium-rich foods.
- Adequate caloric intake (that is, based on age, height, weight, gender, and activity) is essential if bone mass is to be strengthened and maintained; otherwise, your body will be starved of its much-needed nutrients.

Exercise Consistently

- Weight lifting is not only good for your muscles, but also your bones. Since bone is a living tissue, it too is strengthened and grows in response to activity.
- In addition to lifting, perform weight bearing cardiovascular exercise. Running, walking, jogging, cycling, basketball, football, baseball, tennis, dancing, racquetball, etc. Any exercise in which weight is placed on your bones (unlike swimming, for example) is great!
- Perform each type of exercise at least 2-4x per week for at least 30 minutes per session.

I think I may have osteoporosis? What should I do?

If you think there is a possibility that you have osteoporosis or are losing bone mass, here's what to do:

- Make an appointment with your general practitioner or doctor to discuss the problem.
- Schedule a Bone Mineral Density (BMD) test to check the bone mass in your spine and hip. (it's painless - like an X-ray)

Once your doctor gets the results, he/she will go over the best treatment for you. **Don't worry – it can be treated!**

- **Follow all of the guidelines for prevention.** Even though they cannot cure the disease, they can definitely slow loss and build more bone.
- **Talk to your doctor about medication options.** These will also slow bone loss, as well as increase bone density, and reduce the risk of fracture.
- **Educate yourself about the disease** – the more you know, the better you'll understand what your options mean.

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