



Osteoporosis Basics

Osteoporosis, which means "porous bones," is a preventable and treatable disease that thins and weakens your bones, making them fragile and more likely to break. National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) estimates as many as eight million women in the U.S. have osteoporosis, and that by 2020, 14 million people over age 50 will have osteoporosis.

Although men can also suffer from osteoporosis, the vast majority of individuals affected by osteoporosis are women. In fact, the annual number of osteoporotic fractures in women is greater than the number of heart attacks, strokes, and cases of breast cancer combined. Women are four times more likely to develop osteoporosis of the spine than men.

Although the disease can strike at any age, women are at greatest risk for osteoporosis after menopause. As many as 40 percent of women age 50 years and older have low bone mass, a condition called osteopenia, increasing their risk for osteoporosis. A major reason for this is that women's bodies produce less estrogen after menopause, and estrogen plays an important role in helping to prevent bone loss.

The good news is that osteoporosis can be prevented and treated and bone health can be maintained. It is never too late to learn how to maintain and keep your bones healthy.

About Your Bones

Your bones are complex living tissue. They provide structure and support for your muscles, protect your organs and store 99 percent of the calcium used by the soft tissues of your body for their various functions.

Healthy bone is strong and dense with many interconnecting pieces. Bone affected by osteoporosis is porous, fragile and weak. Low bone mass, a condition called osteopenia, affects as many as 34 million Americans, increasing their risk for osteoporosis as they age.

Bone changes regularly through a process called remodeling, in which the body breaks down old bone and replaces it with new, strong bone. This process continues throughout life, but varies significantly as you age.

Bone loss continues at a slower pace throughout your life, and may accelerate again in your older years, usually after age 70. Often, the first symptom of osteoporosis is a broken bone, which is called a fracture. The common sites for these fractures are the hip, spine or wrist.

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