



Stronger Bones for Life

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes your bones to become thin and break (fracture) easily. You cannot feel or see your bones getting thinner. Although you can break a bone in any part of your body, the most common bones that fracture are in the spine, wrist, and hip.

Broken bones in the spine may cause pain, a loss of height, and stooped posture. Wrist fractures are common and can be painful and interfere with your usual activities. Hip fractures most often occur in older adults as a result of a fall, and surgery is usually required. A hip fracture is serious and the results can be devastating, including reduced quality of life and loss of independence. Complications from a hip fracture can increase the risk of dying.

The Good News:

The good news is that osteoporosis and broken bones do not have to be a normal part of aging. Osteoporosis is easily diagnosed and can be treated to reduce the consequences of the disease.

Actions to Promote Strong Bones for Life:

Eat a variety of healthy (nutrient-rich) foods every day. Eat several servings of fruits and vegetables each day. The average person should eat 4 ½ cups of fruits and vegetables daily.

Consume 1,200mg (milligrams) of calcium every day. It is best to get calcium from the foods you eat. Foods rich in calcium include low fat dairy foods (milk, yogurt, cheese), dark green leafy vegetables (bok choy, broccoli, collard greens, kale, and turnip greens), canned fish (sardines, salmon) eaten with bones, and calcium-fortified foods. Try to eat a calcium-rich food at each meal. If you cannot get the calcium you need from food alone, speak to your healthcare provider about whether a calcium supplement is right for you. You only need to consume 1,200mg a day from food and supplements combined.

Get the recommended amount of vitamin D. Getting enough vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium and may increase muscle strength to help prevent falls in older adults. There are only a few good natural sources of vitamin D, including fatty fish such as salmon, sardines, and tuna. Small amounts of vitamin D are added to all milk and some types of soy milk, rice milk, almond milk, yogurt, cheese, juice, and nutrition bars. You may need a vitamin D supplement to get enough vitamin D. Everyone needs at least 600 to 800 IU, but your healthcare provider may recommend more for you.

Do not smoke. If you do, STOP. Call 1-800-NYQUITS for information about how to quit.

Limit alcohol consumption. Before drinking alcohol, it is important to speak to your healthcare provider about possible interactions with your medication or your medical condition. Too much alcohol can be bad for your bones and your overall health.

Be physically active every day. Physical activity can help prevent bone loss, improve posture, promote balance, increase muscle mass to cushion bones in the event of a fall, and improve overall health. Walking, climbing stairs, and dancing are impact (or weight-bearing) exercises that strengthen your bones by moving your body against gravity when you are upright. Resistance exercises such as lifting weights or using exercise bands strengthen your bones and your muscles too! Tai Chi is an example of physical activity that improves posture and balance to help decrease your risk for falls and fractures.

Exercise can be easy; try 10 minutes at a time, adding up the minutes to reach your goal. It is recommended that you talk with your healthcare provider before beginning any exercise routine. This is especially important if you have any medical conditions, have osteoporosis, and/or have or a history of broken bones. In these cases, speak with your healthcare provider about meeting with a physical therapist for an individualized plan for safe physical activity.

Take safety precautions to prevent falls. Most broken bones occur as the result of a fall. If someone has been diagnosed with osteoporosis, he or she can fracture a bone more easily from a fall. Falls happen for many reasons, most of which can be avoided. A few of the many tips for fall prevention in your home include using nightlights, installing handgrips in the bathroom, and using double-sided tape or non-skid backing to secure area rugs. Always remove clutter and tripping hazards inside your home and yard.

Get a BMD test. A simple bone mineral density (BMD) test can diagnose osteoporosis. A low dose x-ray of the hip and spine is the type of BMD test recommended. This is called a DXA or dual x-ray absorptiometry.

If you are a woman over age 65 or a man over age 70, you are considered to be at risk for osteoporosis. Therefore, Medicare covers the cost of the BMD test. Speak to your healthcare provider about getting a prescription for this very important test.

Treatment of Osteoporosis:

If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis or have had a fracture, it is important to speak to your healthcare provider to discuss treatment options. Medications for osteoporosis treatment help reduce the risk for bone loss and broken bones. It is always important to continue to take the above actions to promote stronger bones.

The New York State Osteoporosis Prevention Education Program (NYSOPEP) is an educational initiative within the New York State Department of Health. NYSOPEP is committed to helping build stronger bones for life by providing current evidence-based bone health education to the public and medical professionals. For more information about the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of osteoporosis, visit the NYSOPEP website at www.NYSOPEP.org, or call NYSOPEP- New York State's Resource Center at Helen Hayes Hospital at (845) 786-4772.