

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease that results in the loss of bone tissue. When bone tissue is lost, the bones become brittle and break more easily.

Signs

The bone loss of osteoporosis often causes no signs. People may not know that they have the disease until their bones become so weak that a sudden strain, bump or fall causes a bone to break.

Bone loss that causes bones in the spine to collapse may be felt or seen as severe back pain, loss of height, stooped posture or a hump.

Tests

Talk to your doctor about testing for osteoporosis. Your doctor may order one of these tests:

- A **heel ultrasound** – This test looks for bone loss. You will need to take your shoes and socks off. Small pads are placed on each side of your heel. The test will take a few minutes and does not hurt.
- A **bone density scan**, also called DEXA – This x-ray test measures bone density in the lower spine, hip or wrist. The test takes only a few minutes. Do not wear clothing with metal zippers, snaps or under-wires. The results of the scan are reported as the amount of bone loss.
- A **blood test** – This test checks hormone levels and looks for other conditions that increase bone loss.

Your Care

Start at an early age to prevent and treat osteoporosis. Keep your bones strong throughout your life. Treatments can help stop or slow down further bone loss and bone breaks, but there is no cure.

- Eat a diet high in calcium or take calcium supplements each day.
 - **For those 19-50 years of age**, eat 3 servings or 1000 milligrams of calcium each day.

- **For those over 50 years of age**, eat 4 servings or 1200 milligrams of calcium each day.
- Sources of calcium in foods include milk, dairy products or calcium-fortified foods such as juices or cereals.
- Calcium supplements may be an option if you cannot get enough calcium in your diet.
- Do not increase your calcium intake above the advised amount.
- Vitamin D is needed with calcium, and sunshine is the greatest source of Vitamin D. Being in the sun for 15 minutes a day three times a week gives the body enough Vitamin D. If you cannot get enough sunlight, take 400-800 international units of Vitamin D each day.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Being underweight puts you at higher risk for osteoporosis.
- Perform standing exercises such as walking, jogging, dancing and aerobics 3-4 hours per week.
- Stop smoking or tobacco use.
- Limit alcohol, caffeine and carbonated drinks.
- Talk to your doctor about medicines to reduce bone loss.
- Ask your doctor about estrogen replacement therapy if you are going through menopause or have had your ovaries removed. Estrogen can prevent more bone loss, but there are risks with this treatment. Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits.

Talk with your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.