

What Is Osteoporosis?



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Osteoporosis is a condition that causes your bones to weaken and to easily break or fracture. Women are four times more likely to suffer from osteoporosis than men. Half of all women over the age of 50 will experience a fracture to their hip, wrist, spine, or other bone due to osteoporosis. However, there are things you can do now to reduce your risk of bone loss and fractures.

What can you do to prevent osteoporosis?

- **Get enough calcium.** Women need 1,200 mg of calcium every day to reduce their risk of fracture due to osteoporosis. Most women get less than half of that amount.
- **Take vitamin D.** Ten minutes a day of sunshine or drinking fortified milk provides enough vitamin D. If you don't get outside in the sunshine very often, you need to take more Vitamin D (from 400 to 800 IU) every day. Vitamin D is combined with some calcium tablets.
- **Make activity and exercise a part of each day.** Daily activity helps keep your bones strong and makes it less likely that your bones will break in a fall. Resistance exercise (such as walking, jogging, dancing, or lifting weights) is the best activity for building strong bones and muscles.
- **Stop smoking.** Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease and reduces bone strength. Ask your physician, nurse, or health educator for help to quit.
- **Cut down on your caffeine, salt, and alcohol intake.** Caffeine, salt, and alcohol can reduce bone strength. Experts recommend that women reduce caffeine and salt intake and drink no more than one alcoholic beverage each day to prevent osteoporosis.
- **Know whether you are at risk.** Risk factors for osteoporosis are listed on the other side of this page, in the section titled "Should you get a bone mineral density test for osteoporosis?"

What can you do to prevent falls?

Many women fall and break a bone sometime in their life. As you age, there are steps you can take to keep you free of fractures.

- Stay active to help maintain balance, strength, and coordination.
- Wear low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.
- If your walk is unsteady, use a cane.
- Get your vision checked and wear glasses or contacts if needed.
- Talk to your doctor if you feel dizzy or lightheaded. If you are



taking medications, they might be the cause.

- Keep your house well lit to avoid falling or bumping into things.
- Avoid throw rugs or use rugs with non-slip backing.
- Keep floors and hallways clear of boxes, papers, clothing, and electrical cords.
- Install handrails and non-slip mats in your bath and beside your toilet.
- Make sure you can easily reach all items in your kitchen.
- Avoid standing on chairs, step-stools, or ladders.

Should you get a bone mineral density test for osteoporosis?

Not every woman in midlife should have a bone mineral density (BMD) test. Read the following guidelines below to see if you should talk to your doctor about a BMD test.

If you are 50-59 . . .

You may need a bone mineral density test if your menstrual periods have stopped and you are:

1. not taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or are unsure whether to start taking it;
and
2. two or more of the following **primary risk factors** apply to you:
 - You have a first degree relative with osteoporosis or a hip fracture.

- You currently smoke.
- You weigh less than 127 pounds.
- You have had a fracture after age 45 (excluding fingers, toes, and head).

Other factors that may increase your risk of osteoporosis

- You have had a first degree relative (mother, sister, daughter) with osteoporosis or a hip fracture (especially if your mother has had a hip fracture).
- You are Caucasian or Asian.
- You currently smoke.
- You have a history of no periods or an early menopause (before age 40) naturally, or through a surgical removal of your ovaries, or through radiation or chemotherapy treatment.
- Your lifestyle is sedentary (fewer than three, half-hour exercise sessions per week).

If you are age 60-69 . . .

You may need to have a BMD test if you are not currently taking HRT, Raloxifene (Evista), Alendronate (Fosamax), or other new medication to prevent or treat osteoporosis.

If you are age 70+ . . .

Consult with your doctor or other medical professional about whether you need a test. Your doctor may be able to check for osteoporosis by using another method such as a spine X-ray.



Other resources

- For more information, see the “Osteoporosis” section of your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* or see *Menopause . . . A Kaiser Permanente Guidebook for Women*.
- Visit the Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center nearest you.
- Call the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-33-ASK ME (1-800-332-7563) and listen to tape #137 (Osteoporosis).
- Visit our Web site at www.kp.org. Click on the “Kaiser Permanente Members Only” button.
- Contact the National Osteoporosis Foundation: 1232 22nd Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20037-1292 (202) 223-2226 www.nof.org/

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need additional information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.