



Preventing Osteoporosis

Half of all women over the age of 50 will fracture their hip, wrist, spine, or other bone due to osteoporosis.

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a condition that causes your bones to weaken and to break or fracture easily. As many as 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men will suffer from a fracture in their lifetime. However, you can reduce your risk of bone loss and fractures by taking some simple steps now.

How can you prevent osteoporosis?

• Get enough calcium.

Before age 50, women need 1,000 mg of calcium every day. After age 50, both men and women need 1,200 mg of calcium daily. Low-fat dairy foods (milk, cheese, and yogurt) are the best natural sources of calcium. Green vegetables, almonds, and tofu also have very small amounts of calcium. Since most women do not get enough calcium in their diet, it's a good idea to take an over-the-counter calcium supplement

twice a day (500 mg each time), with meals, to increase the amount of calcium your body absorbs.

• Take vitamin D.

Vitamin D is necessary for calcium absorption. Women should take 800-1200 IUs of vitamin D every day. Some calcium or multivitamins have vitamin D added, so check the label. Drinking fortified milk or orange juice and being out in the sunshine provide vitamin D too. However, sunscreen prevents your skin from absorbing vitamin D, so most women need to take supplements.

• Make activity and exercise a part of each day.

Daily activity helps keep your bones strong and makes them less likely to break if you fall. Weight-bearing exercise (walking, jogging, dancing, or lifting weights) is the best way to build strong bones and muscles.

• Stop smoking.

Smoking reduces bone strength and is a major risk factor for heart disease and cancer. Ask your physician or other health care professional for help to quit.

• Cut down on caffeine, salt/sodium, and alcohol.

Caffeine, sodium, and alcohol can reduce bone strength. Experts recommend that women reduce caffeine and sodium intake and drink no more than one alcoholic beverage each day to prevent osteoporosis.

• Get a bone mineral density (BMD) test if you are a woman over age 65 or a man over age 70.

We all lose some bone mass as we age. Bones naturally become thinner (called osteopenia) as you grow older because existing bone is broken down faster than new bone is made. As this occurs, our bones lose calcium and other minerals. Bones become lighter, less dense, and more porous. This increases the chance that they might break or fracture. The BMD test estimates the strength of your bones by measuring the density of minerals in your bones. The results help determine how much bone mass you've lost.



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What are the risk factors for osteoporosis?

It's important to know if you are at risk. Risk factors include:

- Having a fracture after age 50 due to “fragile” bones.
- Smoking.
- Weighing less than 127 pounds or having a body mass index (BMI) less than 21.
- Having a parent, sister, or brother who has had a hip fracture.
- Having a history of falls in the past 12 months.
- Being hit, hurt, or threatened can seriously affect you health. There is help.

When should you get a bone mineral density test?

- A bone mineral density test is recommended for all women at age 65, and for all men starting at 70.
- For women at high risk of osteoporosis, a bone mineral density testing may be recommended before age 65.
- If you are uncertain, talk with your doctor or other health care professional about whether you need a test.

How can you prevent falls?

As you age, simple steps can prevent fractures.

- Stay active to maintain balance, strength, and coordination.
- Wear low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.
- Use a cane if your walk is unsteady.
- Get your vision checked regularly and wear glasses or contacts if needed.
- Tell your doctor if you feel dizzy or lightheaded. This may be caused by medications you are taking.
- Keep your house well lit to avoid falling or bumping into things.
- Avoid throw rugs and 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 bathtub or shower and beside your toilet.
- Make sure you can easily reach all items in your kitchen.
- Avoid standing on chairs, stepstools, or ladders.

Additional resources

- Visit our Web site at kp.org or your doctor's Home Page at kp.org/mydoctor.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Read *Menopause . . . A Kaiser Permanente Guidebook for Women* .
- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department.
- Contact the National Osteoporosis Foundation: (202) 223-2226 or www.nof.org
- Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.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 health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.