

# Osteoporosis

## What Is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease characterized by a loss of normal bone density. People with osteoporosis are at greater risk for broken bones because their bones are weak and porous like a sponge. Bones that are affected by osteoporosis often crack or collapse from minor injuries that would not fracture a normal, healthy bone.

The condition may be present for years without detection. Often osteoporosis is discovered only after a person has suffered a bone fracture. Physicians use DXA scans (dual energy x-ray absorptiometry scans) to detect low bone density.

## Factors That Increase the Risk of Osteoporosis

- Being female. Women are 5 times more likely than men to have osteoporosis.
- Being over age 50 (both men and women).
- Going through menopause before age 45.
- Having a family history of osteoporosis.
- Having a small body frame.
- Taking certain medications for a long period of time (for example: hormones, seizure medication, and some drugs used to treat asthma, cancer, and arthritis).
- Having poor lifestyle habits such as cigarette smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, lack of exercise, and/or a poor diet.

## Complications of Osteoporosis

The most common complication of osteoporosis is bone fractures. People with osteoporosis most often break bones in the hip, spine and wrist. Fractures can be the result of a fall or accident, but injury can also occur because bones become weakened and compressed. This is often the case with vertebrae injuries. Compression fractures are painful and require a long recovery time. People with many compression fractures in their spine often lose inches in height and their posture becomes stooped.

## Treatment of Osteoporosis

- Consuming a diet rich in Vitamin D and calcium (low-fat dairy products, green leafy vegetables, tofu, canned fish with bones, and fortified orange juice and cereal).
- Adding soy to your diet (because plant estrogens in soy help maintain bone density). Look for soy milk, soynuts, tofu, soy protein bars, soy yogurts, etc.
- Weight-bearing exercise such as walking, jogging, biking, climbing stairs, swimming, and also some strength training.
- Smoking cessation. Smoking leads to loss of bone density.
- If you drink alcohol, limit the amount to one drink per day. Alcohol reduces the body's ability to absorb calcium.
- Hormone therapy may be helpful, but has side effects. Consult your physician to see what is right for you.
- Consult with your physician about whether prescription medications are necessary to strengthen bones.



For more information on osteoporosis, please visit:  
<http://www.medicinenet.com/osteoporosis/article.htm>  
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/osteoporosis/DS00128>