

Osteoporosis Overview

By Dr. Olga Bechtold

Part 1 of 4

Osteoporosis is a common problem that causes bones to become abnormally thin (osteopenic), weakened, and easily broken (fractured). Women are at a higher risk for osteoporosis after menopause due to lower levels of estrogen, a female hormone that helps to maintain bone mass.

Fortunately, preventive treatments are available that can help to maintain or increase bone density. For those already affected by osteoporosis, prompt diagnoses of bone loss and fracture risk are essential because therapies are available that can slow further loss of bone or increase bone density.

Osteoporosis prevention:

Some of the most important treatments for preventing osteoporosis include diet, exercise, and stopping smoking. These recommendations apply to men and women.

1. Diet. An optimal diet for preventing or treating osteoporosis includes eating an adequate number of calories as well as calcium and vitamin D, which are essential in helping to maintain proper bone formation and density.

2. Calcium intake. Experts recommend that premenopausal women and men consume at least 1000 mg of calcium per day; this includes calcium in foods and drinks plus any calcium supplements. You should not take more than 2000 mg calcium per day due to the possibility of side effects.

The main dietary sources of calcium include milk and other dairy products, such as cottage cheese, yogurt, or hard cheese, and green vegetables, such as spinach and broccoli. A rough method of estimating dietary calcium intake is to multiply the number of dairy servings consumed each day by 300 mg. One



serving is 8 oz of milk or yogurt, 1 oz of hard cheese, or 16 oz of cottage cheese.

Calcium supplements (calcium carbonate or calcium citrate) may be suggested if you cannot get enough calcium in your diet. Calcium doses greater than 500 mg/day should be taken in divided doses (eg, once in morning and evening).

3. Vitamin D intake. Experts recommend that most people consume 800 International Units (IU) of vitamin D each day.

This dose appears to reduce bone loss and fracture rate in older women and men when there is adequate calcium intake.

Milk is the primary dietary source of dietary vitamin D, containing approximately 100 IU per cup. Experts recommend vitamin D supplementation for all patients with osteoporosis whose intake of vitamin D is below 400 IU per day. This can be found in a daily multivitamin or a calcium/vitamin D supplement.

4. Protein supplements. Protein supplements may be recommended in some people to ensure sufficient protein intake. This may be particularly important if you have already had an osteoporotic fracture.

Next month we will continue with more recommendations.

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Note: Your healthcare provider is the best source of information for questions and concerns related to your medical problem. Because no two people are exactly alike and recommendations can vary from one person to another, it is important to seek guidance from a provider who is familiar with your individual situation.