Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis, a bone-thinning disease, affects 10 million Americans – eight million of whom are women, according to the National Institutes of Health. It occurs when the body doesn't form enough new bone or too much existing bone is reabsorbed. The disease causes a progressive loss of bone density and strength. As a result, people with osteoporosis are more likely to experience bone fractures. Once diagnosed, treatment should begin. Talk with your doctor about bone health and when a bone density test is right for you.

Symptoms

Osteoporosis is often called the "silent disease" because bone loss occurs without symptoms. Some women may not know that they have osteoporosis until their bones become so weak that a sudden strain, bump or fall causes a hip to fracture or a vertebra to collapse. When this occurs, the disease is in a more advanced stage.

Risk Factors

- As women get older, their risk for osteoporosis increases. The most common risk factors include:
- Being postmenopausal (lower estrogen levels increase the rate at which bone is reabsorbed into the body)
- Early menopause (occurring before 45)
- Surgical menopause (when the uterus and/or ovaries are removed)
- Age (risk increases with each decade)
- History of one or more fractures
- Family history of the disease
- Some medications (for example, thryroid hormones and steroids)
- Thin or small build
- Caucasian or Asian
- Eating disorders
- Smoking
- Alcohol abuse
- Lack of physical activity
- Too little calcium intake (calcium and phosphate are essential for normal bone formation)

Prevention

- Eat a diet with enough calcium, Vitamin D and protein. High calcium foods include dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese), tofu, salmon, sardines (with the bones), and dark green leafy vegetables (such as spinach). Non-pregnant, menstruating women should get 1000 mg of calcium per day; pregnant women need 1200 mg/day and postmenopausal or nursing mothers should receive 1500 mg/day. Depending on how much calcium you get from your diet, you may need to take supplements to reach the recommended levels. Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium. Anyone at increased risk of osteoporosis should take 400 to 800 IU per day.
- Regularly engage in weight-bearing exercises such as walking, hiking, jogging, stair climbing, weight training, tennis, and dancing. This type of exercise causes the muscles to pull on the bones, which stimulates the bone to retain and maybe gain density.
- Drop unhealthy habits. Give up smoking and limit your alcohol intake. Too much alcohol can damage bones and make you more likely to fall. Also limit your intake of caffeinated drinks.
- Prevent falls by ensuring you have corrective lenses and sufficient light to see well. Avoid places where you are apt to fall. Using a handrail in the bath or shower and removing throw rugs can help you avoid an injury.

• Talk to your doctor about taking medications that can help prevent osteoporosis.

Bone Density Testing

The National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends that every woman over 65 get a bone density scan.

A Bone Densitometry (DEXA) exam is a low-dose X-ray that looks for loss of mineral and thinning of bone. Usually the hip, hand, spine, or foot are X-ray, but the most accurate results come with testing on the hip or spine. It is a simple, painless procedure that can be completed in about 15 minutes. A physician who is trained to interpret the test results will identify any areas of concern. Tests in subsequent years will be compared with the initial test results to help to monitor your rate of bone loss.

For a DEXA exam

Carondelet Imaging Center

630 N. Alvernon Way, Tucson

Need doctor's referral, but no appointment required Monday - Friday, 7:30 am to 3:30 pm

Green Valley Imaging Center

400 W. Camino Casa Verde, Green Valley Need doctor's referral, but no appointment required Monday – Friday, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

St. Mary's Imaging Center

1750 W. Anklam Road, Tucson call Central Scheduling at 520.872.7200 for an appointment

Holy Cross Hospital

1171 W. Target Range Road, Nogales To schedule an appointment, call 520.285.8090

(link to PDF: Printable summary of this information)

