

# Osteoporosis



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Osteoporosis, which means “porous bones”, is the thinning and loss of density of bones, which makes bones more brittle, fragile and more likely to break after minor trauma. It is generally associated with aging, which leads to a drop in estrogen in women at menopause and a drop in testosterone in men. Other causes include being underweight, excessive alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, eating disorders, taking certain drugs, some chronic diseases, and long-term bed rest or immobilization. Osteopenia is a lesser form of this condition and, if not treated, may progress to osteoporosis.

No symptoms may be obvious early in the disease, but in time, low back and neck pain, stooped posture,

and gradual loss of height may be seen. In other cases, the first sign is a fracture. Vertebral compression fractures occur when the bone weakens and can no longer support the load imposed upon it. In the spine, the thoracic and lumbar segments are the most commonly affected. Also common are hip and wrist fractures.

The most reliable test to screen for osteoporosis is a dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) scan. Generally, the lower spine and hip are scanned. Your bone quality is reported by comparing you to others of the same age and gender as well as to a young adult population. The results are usually considered in terms of your bone being of *normal density*, somewhat reduced density (called *osteopenia*) or significantly reduced density (*osteoporosis*).

Treatment includes supplementation with calcium and Vitamin D. Physical therapy may help you build bone strength and improve your posture, balance and muscle strength, making falls less likely. Weight-bearing exercise is vital for prevention. In addition, a number of medications are available to help slow bone loss and maintain bone mass.

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