

# Osteoporosis

## What is it?

Osteoporosis, also called the "silent disease," is a common bone disease in which bones become thinner and more porous. Osteoporosis affects both men and women and occurs when the body fails to form new bone.

During the course of your life, the body needs the minerals phosphate and calcium to build bones. If your dietary intake of these minerals is not sufficient or if the body does not absorb enough of the minerals from the diet, bone production and bone tissue will suffer resulting in brittle and fragile bones. These bones are then subject to fracture.

You may have heard of osteoporosis referred to as the "silent disease" because it's a disease that occurs over the course of many years. The loss of bone mass does not occur overnight. It usually occurs gradually over an extended period of time. In fact, most people are not even aware that they have osteoporosis until they fracture a bone. And it's at that time that a person finds the disease is in its advanced stages

## What are its symptoms?

Unfortunately, there are no symptoms associated with early signs of osteoporosis. Symptoms occurring late in the disease include:

Fractures of the vertebrae, wrists or hips

Low back pain

Neck pain

Bone pain or tenderness

Loss of height over time

Stooped posture

## What are the causes of osteoporosis?

Loss of estrogen due to menopause

Hormonal disorder such as Cushing's syndrome, hyperthyroidism and hyperparathyroidism

Diet low in calcium

Family history of the disease

Chronic liver disease and intestinal disorders

## How is osteoporosis diagnosed?

A bone density test is used to diagnose osteoporosis. A bone density test measures bone mineral content and the strength of the bones. A low bone density test result can indicate that you may be at risk for future bone fractures. The test can also show the rate of bone mineral loss and bone gain for those receiving treatment.

## How you can prevent osteoporosis

Eat a diet throughout life containing calcium, phosphorus and vitamin D. By the late 20s and into the early 30s peak bone mass is reached. You may want to talk to your doctor about taking calcium supplements when you reach this age bracket. Regular life-long exercise can also reduce the likelihood of bone fractures and weight-bearing exercise helps reduce bone mineral loss.

Exercise such as walking, jogging, swimming, and skiing are all excellent for the bones, although they are not weight-bearing. Make sure you see your internist for general physical exams regularly and talk with him or her about your risk for osteoporosis and the need for a bone density test.

## Is it treatable?

Yes. Although there is no cure for osteoporosis, it is a treatable disease. Many medications slow

and sometimes stop bone mineral loss. Talk to your internist about proper treatment.

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