

# What Is Osteoporosis?



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**O**steoporosis is a condition that causes your bones to weaken and to easily break or fracture. Women are four times more likely to suffer from osteoporosis than men. Half of all women over the age of 50 will experience a fracture to their hip, wrist, spine, or other bone due to osteoporosis. However, there are things you can do now to reduce your risk of bone loss and fractures.

## What can you do to prevent osteoporosis?

- **Get enough calcium.** Women need 1,000 to 1,500 mg of calcium every day to reduce their risk of fracture due to osteoporosis. Past menopause, women need 1,200 to 1,500 mg of calcium. Low-fat dairy foods (like milk, cheese, and yogurt) are the best natural sources of calcium. Other foods like green vegetables, almonds, and tofu have calcium, but in very small amounts. Since most women do not get enough calcium in their diet, it's a good idea to take an over-the-counter calcium supplement twice a day (500 mg each time) with meals to increase absorption.
- **Take vitamin D.** Women should take 400 to 800 IUs of vitamin D every day. Some calcium or multivitamins have vitamin D added, so check the label. Drinking fortified milk or orange juice and being out in the sunshine can add to your vitamin D intake.

- **Make activity and exercise a part of each day.** Daily activity helps keep your bones strong and makes it less likely that your bones will break in a fall. Resistance exercise (such as walking, jogging, dancing, or lifting weights) is the best activity for building strong bones and muscles.
- **Stop smoking.** Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease and reduces bone strength. Ask your physician, nurse, or health educator for help to quit.
- **Cut down on your caffeine, salt/sodium, and alcohol intake.** Caffeine, sodium, and alcohol can reduce bone strength. Experts recommend that women reduce caffeine and sodium intake and drink no more than one alcoholic beverage each day to prevent osteoporosis.
- **Know whether you are at risk.** Risk factors for osteoporosis are listed on the other side of this page, in the section titled "Should you get a bone mineral density test for osteoporosis?"

## What can you do to prevent falls?

Many women fall and break a bone sometime in their life. As you age, there are steps you can take to keep you free of fractures.

- Stay active to help maintain balance, strength, and coordination.
- Wear low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.
- If your walk is unsteady, use a cane.



- Get your vision checked and wear glasses or contacts if needed.
- Talk to your doctor if you feel dizzy or lightheaded. If you are taking medications, they might be the cause.
- Keep your house well lit to avoid falling or bumping into things.
- Avoid throw rugs or use rugs with non-slip backing.
- Keep floors and hallways clear of boxes, papers, clothing, and electrical cords.
- Install handrails and non-slip mats in your bath and beside your toilet.
- Make sure you can easily reach all items in your kitchen.
- Avoid standing on chairs, step-stools, or ladders.

### Should you get a bone mineral density test for osteoporosis?

Not every woman in midlife should have a bone mineral density (BMD) test. Read the following guidelines below to see if you should talk to your doctor about a BMD test.

#### If you are 50-59 . . .

You may need a bone mineral density test if your menstrual periods have stopped and you are:

1. not taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT)  
*and*

2. two or more of the following **primary risk factors** apply to you:
  - You have had a first degree relative (mother, sister, daughter) with osteoporosis (especially if your mother has had a hip fracture).
  - You currently smoke.
  - You weigh less than 127 pounds.
  - You have had a fracture after age 45 (excluding fingers, toes, and head).
  - You require the use of your arms to stand up from a chair.

#### Other factors that may increase your risk of osteoporosis

- You are Caucasian or Asian.
- You have a history of no periods or an early menopause (before age 40) naturally, or through a surgical removal of your ovaries, or through radiation or chemotherapy treatment.
- Your lifestyle is sedentary (fewer than three, half-hour exercise sessions per week).

#### If you are age 60-65 . . .

If you have a single primary risk factor listed in the 50-59 section, you may need a bone density test.

#### If you are over age 65 . . .

A BMD is recommended.

#### If you are age 80+ . . .

Consult with your doctor or other medical professional about whether you need a test.



### Other resources

- For more information, see the “Osteoporosis” section of your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* or see *Menopause . . . A Kaiser Permanente Guidebook for Women*.
- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or department.
- Call the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563 and listen to tape #137 (Osteoporosis).  
TTY: 1-800-777-9059
- Visit our Web site at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org)
- Contact the National Osteoporosis Foundation:  
1232 22nd Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20037-1292  
(202) 223-2226  
[www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)

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