

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition in which a person's bone mass is lost faster than it can be replaced. This results in bones that are weaker, less dense and more likely to break. There are 10 million individuals with osteoporosis in the United States and an additional 34 million are at high risk.

The most important thing any woman can do to reduce her risk of osteoporosis is to be aware of the risk factors and follow screening guidelines. When osteoporosis is detected early, chances of it being successfully managed are the greatest.



Symptoms

Most of the time, a woman doesn't know she has osteoporosis until a bone breaks. The bones most at risk for fracture are those of the hips, spine and wrists. Symptoms of osteoporosis vary from person to person and may include:

- loss in height of an inch-and-a-half or more
- sudden onset of localized pain

Reducing Your Risk

You can take action to reduce your risks of developing osteoporosis.

- **Take daily calcium supplements.** Pre-menopausal women should take 1,000 milligrams a day while post-menopausal women should take 1,500 milligrams per day. Chewable antacid medications also are a good source of calcium. Cheese, milk, yogurt and sardines also have high levels of calcium.
- **Take daily vitamin D supplements.** Women under age 60 should take one multi-vitamin per day while women over 60 should take two.

Screening

Women are encouraged to have a bone density test after they reach menopause. It is possible to lose up to 20 percent of bone mass in the five to seven years following menopause, increasing susceptibility to osteoporosis.

A bone density test can:

- detect osteoporosis before a fracture occurs
- predict your chances of future fractures
- assess bone loss rate and/or monitor the effects of treatment

Risk Factors

Many factors may influence the development of osteoporosis, including:

- **gender** Women are four times more likely to be affected than men.
- **age** One in two women over age 50 will have an osteoporosis-related fracture in their lifetime.
- **hormones** Early menopause is one of the strongest predictors of the development of osteoporosis in women.
- **race** Up to 50 percent of postmenopausal white women will have an osteoporosis-related fracture in her lifetime. The percentage is much lower for non-white women.
- **family history** The risk is higher in someone with a first-degree relative (parent, sibling) with osteoporosis.
- **lack of exercise**
- **lack of calcium or vitamin D**
- **use of tobacco products**
- **excessive use of alcohol** Women who drink more than one drink per day are at increased risk.
- **drugs** Certain chemotherapy drugs increase risk.
- **hypogonadism** Women with a loss of function in the ovaries are at increased risk.
- **other diseases** Individuals with diseases such as hyperparathyroidism, hyperthyroidism, multiple myeloma and Cushing's syndrome are at increased risk.
- **body type** An individual who is thin or has a small frame is at increased risk.
- **medications** The use of certain medications, such as corticosteroids and anticonvulsants, put individuals at increased risk.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Hormone replacement therapy is used by women to relieve the symptoms of menopause, such as hot flashes, night sweats and mood swings. Hormone replacement therapy involves using medication that contains estrogen alone or some combination of estrogen and progesterone. Estrogen and progesterone are both female hormones.

Ask your health care provider if using hormone replacement therapy is the best choice for you. He or she can identify your personal risk factors, tell you what type of hormone replace therapy is best for you and help you make an informed decision.

Determine Your Risk

Health care professionals now have a better understanding of the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy. Each woman must weigh the benefits versus the risks based on lifestyle, and family and personal medical history.

Until recently, most doctors thought the benefits of hormone replacement therapy outweighed the risks. Today, however, there is evidence to the contrary. Some of the risks identified with taking hormones are uterine cancer, breast cancer, heart disease, blood clots and stroke. To aid in your decision-making about whether to take hormones, ask your health care professional for the following risk assessments:

- bone density test
- computerized risk assessment for breast cancer
- risk assessment for heart attack, stroke and blood clots.
Risk factors include high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, sedentary lifestyle and family history of heart disease.

MD Anderson Resources

The Cancer Prevention Center can help you understand your risk of developing cancer through risk assessment and, when appropriate, genetic testing. The center offers personalized risk-reduction strategies, including healthy lifestyle recommendations and the use of medications to reduce cancer risk. Specialists perform risk-based cancer screening exams based on age, gender and cancer risk factors.

MD Anderson provides cancer care services at five convenient locations in the greater Houston area: Bay Area, Katy, Texas Medical Center, Sugar Land and The Woodlands.

For more information about MD Anderson programs or services, or to make an appointment, contact askMDAnderson at 1-877-632-6789 and ask for Carla, or visit www.mdanderson.org/ask.

Want to learn how you can prevent cancer?

Get a personalized action plan by completing MD Anderson's Cancer Risk Check at www.mdanderson.org/riskcheck.



Understand Other Therapies

Hormone replacement therapy is not the only treatment for menopausal symptoms. Other therapies are available to reduce symptoms and osteoporosis risk. Ask your doctor for more information.

If you currently take hormones, you may want to stop therapy to see how severe your menopausal symptoms truly are. Discuss this option with your health care provider first.

You and your doctor can weigh the risks and benefits of hormones compared with other medications or treatments. If your symptoms are mild or manageable with other therapies, you may decide to stop using hormones.