

# How To Prevent Osteoporosis

## Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes loss of bone density, or bone mass, leaving bones thin and weak. This means that bones may break easily.

Bone is growing, living tissue. Old bone cells break down and new cells replace them. After age 30, bone cells break down faster than they grow. This results in a loss of bone mass. Bones can become weak and brittle.

During midlife, bone loss usually speeds up in both men and women, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation. Women can lose 20 percent or more of their bone density in 5 to 7 years after menopause.

Osteoporosis has no symptoms.

## Who is at Risk

Risks you cannot change:

- being born female
- getting older
- having a family history of fractures.

Risks you can change:

- taking certain medicines, such as steroids and anti-seizure medicines, for a long time (**Important:** Do not stop taking any medicine without talking to your health care provider.)
- having low estrogen levels (females) or low testosterone levels (males)
- not getting regular exercise

- smoking
- drinking too much alcohol
- not getting enough vitamin D or calcium.

## Get Enough Calcium

Calcium is important for strong bones and teeth.

- The amount of calcium you need each day depends on your sex\* and age. Talk with your health care provider about the right amount for you.
- Talk with your health care provider about taking a supplement if you need.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine. More than 2 or 3 ounces of alcohol or 3 cups of coffee a day keep your body from absorbing calcium.

## Get Enough Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important to keep your bones strong and healthy.

- Talk with your health care provider about the right amount for you each day.
- Your body makes vitamin D when your skin is exposed to direct sunlight. Cloud cover, shade and using sunscreen or clothing to protect your skin from the sun will cut down the amount of vitamin D your skin makes.

**(over)**

\*Adults assigned female or male at birth.

You can spend some time in the sun each day, but be sure to wear an SPF 15 or higher sunscreen if you plan to be in the sun for more than 15 minutes. This will lower your risk for skin cancer.

In the northern half of the United States between late fall and early spring, energy from the sun is not enough for people to make vitamin D.

- Talk with your health care provider if you should take a supplement.

## Get Exercise

Exercises that work your bones and muscles help spur bone growth.

- Get at least 30 minutes of weight-bearing exercise each day. You can break it up into 10-minute chunks. Good choices are:
  - walking
  - lifting weights
  - aerobics
  - yoga
  - dancing
  - gardening or yard work
  - climbing stairs.

- Wear a pedometer, if possible. Aim for at least 10,000 steps each day.
- If you can't do weight-bearing exercises, try swimming or cycling. They won't help build bone mass but they are good for your heart.
- Fit physical activity into your everyday routine:
  - Use stairs instead of the escalator or elevator.
  - Drive less and walk or bike more often.
  - Park at the far end of the parking lot.
  - Step in place while watching TV.
- If you are not used to exercise, talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.