

# Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a bone disease caused by loss of bone mass and weakening of bone tissue. It's normal for bones to become weaker and less dense as you age. If you have osteoporosis, this happens more quickly, resulting in an increased risk of life-changing fractures.<sup>1</sup>

## What are bones?

Bones are made of living tissue. Bone is continually being broken down and rebuilt—a process called remodeling. As people get older, bone breakdown happens faster than rebuilding. This makes the bones weaker and more porous. People typically begin losing more bone than their bodies make in their 30s, and the process speeds up with age. For women, bone loss is fastest in the first few years after menopause.<sup>1</sup>

## What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a bone disease that occurs when the body loses too much bone, makes too little bone or both. This causes bones to become weak and more likely to break. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, 54 million Americans have osteoporosis or low bone mass, making it the most common bone disease.<sup>2</sup>

## Are you at risk?

Certain factors have been associated with an increased risk of osteoporosis.<sup>1</sup> **Place a check mark by each risk factor that may apply to you.**

- |                                                                      |                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 65 years or older                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Not physically active                                                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy alcohol drinker                                                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian or Asian ethnicity                | <input type="checkbox"/> Smoker                                                                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family history of osteoporosis              | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking bone-weakening medications (i.e., steroids, thyroid and anti-seizure medicines) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small bone structure or body weight         |                                                                                                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor diet (low in calcium and/or vitamin D) |                                                                                                                 |

If you have two or more risk factors, talk to your healthcare provider about being screened.

## Questions for your doctor about your osteoporosis risk:



## Have you been screened for osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is called a “silent disease” because it often has no symptoms. This is why it’s important to have an osteoporosis screening.<sup>1</sup>

Talk to your healthcare provider about getting a **dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) scan, also known as a bone density scan**. This quick, safe and painless scan measures your spine, hip or total body bone density to find out how strong—or dense—your bones are and whether or not you have osteoporosis.

The National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends having a bone density test if you:<sup>3</sup>

- Are a woman age 65 or older
- Are a man age 70 or older risk factors
- Have broken a bone after age 50
- Are a man age 50–69 with risk factors
- Are a woman of menopausal age with risk factors
- Are a postmenopausal woman under age 65 with risk factors<sup>3</sup>

Talk to your healthcare provider to see if you need to be screened and if so, how often.

## Tips to help improve bone health

According to the National Institutes of Health, there are many things you can do to help strengthen your bones, including:

- **Get enough calcium and vitamin D.** Calcium and vitamin D are needed for strong bones. Calcium-rich foods include low-fat dairy products, canned fish with soft bones like salmon, and dark leafy green vegetables like kale, collards and turnip greens. Vitamin D helps your body absorb the calcium you’re putting into it. You can get vitamin D from sunlight, or from eggs, fatty fish and some fortified foods and beverages.
- **Be physically active.** Weight-bearing activities like walking, hiking, dancing, strength training, and tai chi may help strengthen bones and prevent falls.
- **If you smoke, quit.** Smoking isn’t just bad for your heart and lungs, it’s bad for your bones too.
- **Limit alcohol.** Drinking too much alcohol may disrupt the balance of calcium in the body and lead to falls.<sup>1</sup>

## Sources

1. “Bone Health and Osteoporosis,” National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, last accessed August 9, 2024, <https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/bone-health-and-osteoporosis#c>.
2. “What is Osteoporosis and What Causes it?,” National Osteoporosis Foundation, last accessed August 9, 2024, <https://www.bonehealthandosteoporosis.org/patients/what-is-osteoporosis/>.
3. “Evaluation of Bone Health/Bone Density Testing,” National Osteoporosis Foundation, last accessed August 9, 2024, <https://www.bonehealthandosteoporosis.org/patients/diagnosis-information/bone-density-examtesting/>.

This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your healthcare provider. Talk to your provider before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.