

May Is National Osteoporosis Month

Osteoporosis is a very common condition that causes bones to become weak and brittle - so brittle that even a minor fall or mild stress, like bending over or coughing, can cause a painful fracture. Osteoporosis-related fractures most commonly occur in the hip, wrist or spine.

Who is at risk for osteoporosis?

Naturally, as you age your bones get thinner. There are more than 3 million cases per year reported in the US. Both men and women are at risk of developing osteoporosis, although women have a higher probability of contracting this condition due to the reduction of estrogen in their later years.

What are the risk factors?

- Age - your risk increases as you get older.
- Alcohol - prolonged heavy drinking limits your body's ability to effectively use calcium.
- Body frame - having a slender body frame increased your likelihood.
- Caffeine - high caffeine intake (4+ cups per day) inhibits calcium absorption.
- Calcium and vitamin D - deficiency of these essential nutrients can affect your risk.
- Exercise - lack of sufficient weight-bearing exercise is a factor.
- Genetics - osteoporosis tends to run in families.
- Medications – steroids used chronically and drugs used to treat acid reflux increase your risk.
- Menopause - your body makes less estrogen, which protects the body from bone loss.
- Race - people of European and Asian background are more likely to get osteoporosis.
- Smoking - smokers lose bone at faster rates than non-smokers.

What are the signs of osteoporosis?

Sometimes the first sign is a broken bone after a fall or bump. However, osteoporosis can be very far along before you notice it. As the disease gets worse, you may have other signs and symptoms, such as back pain. You also might notice that you are not as tall as you used to be, and have a curved backbone.

How can you prevent osteoporosis?

Adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D, a healthy diet, and weight-bearing exercise can help prevent bone loss or strengthen already weak bones. It is also important for teens and preteens to understand that adequate calcium, vitamin D, and physical activity during these years will increase their bone mass and greatly reduce their risk of osteoporosis later in life.

How is osteoporosis treated?

Although there is no cure for osteoporosis, there are steps you can take to slow or stop its progress. In some cases, you may even be able to improve bone density and reverse the disorder to some degree. The goal of treatment is to protect and strengthen the bones. Treatment may include prescription medications or lifestyle changes; including exercising regularly, increasing calcium and Vitamin D intake, and even limiting your alcohol and caffeine intake.

What should you discuss with your doctor?

- You want to discuss your risk for osteoporosis.
- You are having menopausal symptoms or are menopausal and want to discuss whether you should take medicine to prevent osteoporosis.
- You have been treated for a fracture caused by a minor injury, such as a simple fall.