

OSTEOPOROSIS

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a common bone disease. Normally the substances that form bone are continuously changing and rebuilding during one's life time. However, this natural process slows down with aging causing bones to become thin, weak and more likely to break or fracture.

Osteoporosis is a painless, or "silent" disease until a fracture occurs, generally in the hip, spine, or wrist. According to the United States Surgeon General, an estimated 25 million Americans over the age of 50 have osteoporosis, and 34 million more people are at risk. Fractures related to osteoporosis may lead to permanent disability, loss of independence, or death.

Who is at risk for Osteoporosis?

There are four major risk factors associated with osteoporosis:

1. Body type: small thin women are at greater risk
2. Family history of osteoporosis
3. Personal history of a traumatic fracture
4. Lifestyle: smoking cigarettes

Other risk factors that are associated with osteoporosis include:

- Gender: women have 4 times greater risk than men
- Age: risk increases with age
- Ethnicity: Caucasian and Asian women are at greatest risk; African American and Hispanic women have a lower risk
- Sex Hormones: low estrogen levels in women due to menopause or missed periods; low testosterone levels in men.
- Sedentary lifestyle or long-term bed rest
- Low calcium and vitamin D intake
- Certain Medications: Such as steroids, some anti-seizure medications, and some cancer medications
- Anorexia nervosa

How is Osteoporosis Diagnosed?

A specialized test called a Bone Density Scan or DEXA Scan is used to measure bone thickness in various parts of the body. This test can detect osteoporosis before fractures occur, help to assess your rate of bone loss, and monitor the impact of treatments your physician recommends.

How Can I Prevent Osteoporosis?

Preventing osteoporosis is a life-long process that includes a good diet and regular exercise. As adults, preserving bone and preventing fractures includes:

- Adequate calcium and vitamin D intake
- Weight bearing and resistance exercise
- Lifestyle modifications, including smoking cessation and limited alcohol intake
- Fall prevention techniques, such as reducing home clutter, anchoring carpets and rugs, wearing shoes with rubber soles, having adequate lighting in the house (See Fall Prevention Patient/Family information sheet).
- Medication, as recommended by your physician

Discuss your risk of osteoporosis with your physician and obtain a DEXA scan, if recommended. Be sure to report any change in height, back pain or fatigue, or stooped posture, as these can be warning signs of osteoporosis.

Source: National Osteoporosis Foundation www.nof.org

National Women's Health Resource Center www.healthywomen.org

Bone Health and Osteoporosis: A Report of the Surgeon General www.surgeongeneral.gov/library

NIH Senior Health www.nihseniorhealth.gov/osteoporosis

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education

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