

# Osteoporosis



## What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to become weak and thin. Bones that are weak and thin are more likely to break and fracture. Normally, your body consistently breaks down old bone and builds new bone. As you age, this changes and your body begins to break down more old bone faster than it builds new bone. To keep bones strong and to prevent osteoporosis, you must exercise and eat a healthy diet throughout your lifetime.

Osteoporosis is usually found in women over the age of 50 and men over the age of 70. It can be found in any bone in your body but your back, hips and wrists are the most common. When weak bones easily break it can be very serious. It may keep you from doing the things you want and living your life to the fullest. But we're here to help you prevent osteoporosis or if you already have it, help you manage it.

## What causes osteoporosis?

When you are young, your body is building more bone than it breaks down. Eating foods rich in calcium will make bones and muscles stronger.

That is why as a child, you were told to drink your milk, eat your vegetables and get plenty of exercise.

During young adulthood to age 30, bones are their strongest. This is referred to as peak bone mass. By continuing the good habits, you learned in childhood, you can keep your bones healthy in adulthood.

From age 30 to menopause, bone mass starts to slightly decline. An active lifestyle with family and friends along with getting plenty of calcium and vitamin D rich food will help your body to maintain peak bone mass.

Those years after age 50 are important because your body begins to change, breaking down more bone than it can build. After menopause when a woman stops having monthly periods, estrogen levels drop and bone loss increases. Later in life, both men and women lose more bone than their body makes. The quality and quantity of bone production decreases and your risk for a fracture can increase.

At this point, there are lifestyle changes you can make to slow the process or prevent osteoporosis. You'll learn how throughout this guide.

## Understanding bone loss

Your body naturally has a balanced system to maintain your bones. Normally your body is always losing (resorbing) and making new bone. Bone-resorbing cells use minerals to repair injuries and make new bone. Bone-making cells use calcium and minerals from your diet to form new bone. The same amount of resorbed bone and new bone occur when the system is in balance. However, changes in activity level, medications, hormonal changes and an unhealthy diet can cause the system to become unbalanced. When this happens the amount of bone lost is greater than made. If left untreated, bone loss can increase resulting in weak bones that cannot support your body.

## Understanding fractures

Your wrist, spine and hips are the most common fracture sites for people with osteoporosis. These fractures are often a result of a fall or some type of accident. Osteoporosis does not hurt. In fact, you may not even know you have osteoporosis until you break a bone. Fractures can be very painful and can limit your activity. A hip fracture can be very serious and may need surgery and require months to recover.

## Understanding spinal fractures

There are many bones located in your spine, they are called vertebrae. When you have osteoporosis, it can cause the vertebrae in your spine to collapse. When this happens, your upper back can bend forward creating a curvature in your back. Some people can even lose height. A spinal fracture can also result from bad posture and back strain. If weak bones in the spine (vertebrae) fracture it can cause spinal compression which can cause the back to hump over or bend. To keep your body balanced, your lower spine will adjust. This often can cause back pain.

## Screening for bone loss

Bone strength is measured by their density or thickness. A high bone density means that your bones are less likely to fracture. If your healthcare provider feels that you are at risk for bone loss, they may order bone density testing. A bone density test is a safe, painless, easy and quick way to detect osteoporosis before a fracture occurs. A bone density test can also measure how well you are responding to treatment.

There are several types of testing your healthcare provider can order. Peripheral tests are often used to screen for osteoporosis. The most common type of this testing is the quantitative ultrasound (QUS). It measures bone density in the knee, heel, finger or wrist.

Central tests are used for diagnosis and screening. The dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) is the main central test. This is the standard bone density test. QUS screening is not as accurate and is not as widely accepted like DXA screening.

The results of your tests may be a little confusing to understand. Your healthcare provider will compare your bone mineral density (BMD) with the BMD of a healthy young bone to determine your T-score. The T-score will let your provider know if you have osteoporosis. It will also let your healthcare provider know your risk for a broken bone. A normal T-score is 0. Depending on your T-score your provider may want to repeat the test every two to three years and start you on medicine.

### Who should be tested for osteoporosis?

- Women that are postmenopausal with a fracture
- Women considering treatment for osteoporosis
- Postmenopausal women with one or more risk factors
- Women or men taking certain medications
- All women 65 and men over 70
- Women on hormonal therapy for a long time

## Protect your bones

When it comes to protecting yourself from osteoporosis, there are a few things you can do. Even those who have already been diagnosed with osteoporosis can follow these steps to improve their condition.

### Simple lifestyle changes go a long way

- Eat foods rich in calcium and vitamin D
- Stay active and practice good posture
- Stop smoking
- Limit the amount of alcohol and caffeine you drink
- Have a bone density test to check for osteoporosis
- Take your medicine as directed by your doctor

### Calcium and vitamin D

Your body needs calcium to build and repair bones. Your heart, nerves and muscles also need calcium to work. Since your body does not make calcium naturally, it must get what it needs from the foods you eat. If you do not get enough calcium in your diet, your body will pull what it needs from your bones, over time weakening them.

Vitamin D is important in bone health too. You need vitamin D to absorb the calcium from what you eat. Most of you have enough vitamin D because your body makes it from sunlight. As you get older this process slows down. Some diseases and medicines will also affect the amount of vitamin D you make. In these cases, your doctor may suggest you take a vitamin D supplement.

## Recommended calcium and vitamin D intakes

Life-stage group	Calcium mg/day	Vitamin D (IU/day)
Infants 0 to 6 months	200	400
Infants 6 to 12 months	260	400
1 to 3 years old	700	600
4 to 8 years old	1,000	600
9 to 13 years old	1,300	600
14 to 18 years old	1,300	600
19 to 30 years old	1,000	600
31 to 50 years old	1,000	600
51 to 70-year old males	1,000	600
51 to 70-year old females	1,200	600
Greater than 70 years old	1,200	800
14 to 18 years old, pregnant/lactating	1,300	600
19 to 50 years old, pregnant/lactating	1,000	600

### Calcium supplements

With a well-balanced diet, you can get all the calcium your body needs. The amount you should eat depends on your medical needs and age. If you have trouble getting enough calcium in your diet, your doctor may recommend a calcium supplement.

### Tips for choosing calcium supplements

- Before taking any calcium supplement, talk to your doctor
- Choose calcium citrate or calcium carbonate because they are the easiest for your body to use
- Avoid calcium phosphate because it is hard for your body to breakdown
- Check the label for elemental calcium. You need 1,000 to 1,500 mg a day
- A calcium supplement with extra vitamins and minerals such as magnesium is not needed. However, vitamin D in a supplement may be helpful for absorption of calcium.

### Tips for taking calcium supplements

- Talk to your pharmacist to see if a calcium supplement will affect other medicines you take
- If you take more than one a day, spread them throughout the day. Your body can only absorb 500 mg at a time
- Take with food for best absorption
- Do not take at the same time you take an iron vitamin as it may affect the absorption
- Take with a full glass of water
- Alcohol and caffeine interfere with calcium absorption
- Do not take more than 1,200 mg of calcium a day unless directed by your doctor. Higher amounts of calcium may cause kidney stones and decrease your ability to absorb other nutrients

## Top foods with vitamin D

- Fish like tuna, mackerel and salmon
- Fortified milk orange juice, soy milk, almond milk and cereal
- Cheese, milk and yogurt

Like mentioned earlier, calcium and vitamin D are two vital nutrients your body needs to keep your bones healthy and strong. The good news is there are some easy ways to add them to your diet daily:

- Purchase calcium and vitamin D foods, usually labeled as “enriched” or “fortified”.
- Make hot cereal, cocoa and creamed soups with milk instead of water.
- Add non-fat dry milk to your recipes. For example, add  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of dry milk to 1 pound of meat in your meatloaf.
- Add 2 tablespoons of dry milk to every cup of potatoes for mashed potatoes.
- Mix fresh fruit in your yogurt or cottage cheese.
- Substitute sour cream or mayonnaise with yogurt.
- Snack on cheese and crackers. Sprinkle cheese on your salads, baked potatoes, tacos, enchiladas, broccoli, spaghetti or chili.
- Include a slice of cheese on your sandwiches or hamburger.
- Try pudding made with skim milk for a snack.

## Top foods with calcium

- Spinach, kale and turnips
- Fortified cereals
- Fortified soy milk
- Fortified almond milk
- Sardines

## Physical activity

### How can I stay active?

Being active is important at any age. It helps young people build bone. It helps middle-aged people maintain bone. It helps older people slow down bone loss and helps prevent fractures and spine changes. It also helps build strength and flexibility. Muscle strength and balance are important to avoid falls that can bruise or break a bone. If you have osteoporosis regular exercise is vital for good health.

Some activities work better than others. Weight-bearing activities help you to maintain bone mass. They involve standing on your feet while moving. Including things like walking, dancing, climbing stairs, and house cleaning, but not swimming or biking.

Another type of activity is resistance. Resistance exercises help you to maintain bone mass and builds muscle strength. It also makes you less prone to injury. Resistance training is the act of making free movement harder. These include doing push-ups or sit-ups.

Think about how easy it feels to move when walking across a room. Now think about how it feels to walk across a pool, waist deep in water. This is called resistance. Other examples include lifting free weights or using a resistance band.

These are some simple things you can do to increase activity. Remember to choose activities that you like and can do easily. Ask family or friends to walk with you. Take the stairs instead of using the elevator. Park your car in the spot farthest from the store. Shorten your lunch break and walk for the last 10 minutes. Always check with your healthcare provider before starting any exercise program.

### Improving balance and flexibility

Having strong muscles will help you with balance and flexibility. Yoga, swimming, weight bearing activities (walking, dancing and housework) and gentle stretching exercises are great ways to strengthen your body. Non-weight-bearing exercises such as swimming and water exercise help build trunk and leg muscles. They can also help prevent back strain and pain. Be sure to wear solid shoes and not slippers when exercising.

## Tips to help with balance

- While holding the back of a chair, bend one foot back and stand on the other foot for one minute. Trade feet. Every few days try to stand a little longer on one foot and then the other. Also try to do this with your eyes closed.
- While holding the back of a chair, feet a few inches apart, roll up to your toes. Stay here to the count of 10. Then roll back to the heels of your feet and stay here to the count of 10. Do these 10 times.
- While holding the back of a chair with both hands, make a big circle with your hips. First to the left then to the right. Do not move your feet or shoulders. Repeat 5 times.

## Safe movement

If you are weak or fall a lot, you need to be careful. Some moves like twisting or bending at the waist may be harmful. Before starting any exercise program, talk to your doctor.

Exercise is still important. Being active keeps your muscles toned and helps with balance. You can protect your bones also by using good body position known as posture and learning how to move the right way.

## Good posture or body position is important

Try this first to see what good position looks like:

- Wear shoes that fit and support your foot
- Stand with your back against a wall
- Put your heels 2 inches away from the wall
- Lift your chest
- Keep your head up and look straight ahead

## Position when standing

- Keep your head high, chin in and shoulder back
- Pull your stomach in
- Keep your knees slightly bent
- If standing in one spot for any length of time, put one foot up on a small stool

## Position when sitting

- Use a rolled towel or pillow to support the lower back
- Keep head, back and hips in a straight line, do not slouch
- If your feet do not rest on the floor, use a small stool under them
- When working or reading, do not lean forward

## Position when walking

- Keep your head high, chin in and shoulders back
- Keep your feet pointing straight ahead

## Position while grocery shopping

- Separate heavy items in several bags to keep grocery bags light
- When carrying two bags, carry one in each hand
- Use a cart with wheels to move bags from the store to the car and from the car to home
- Place bags on a chair or counter top to unpack instead of the floor

## Position while cleaning the house

Face your work so you are not twisting your back

- Keep your upper arms close to your body so you are not over reaching
- Shift your weight from one leg to the other when vacuuming, mopping or raking
- Bend at the knee and not at the waist
- Use a long-handled scrub brush so you do not need to bend over or reach above your head

## Position for bending over

- When picking something up, stand with your feet apart next to the item. Keep your back straight, bend down at the knees and hips. Bring the item close to you and use your legs to stand back up.
- To tie shoes or dry feet, sit in a chair and place your foot on footstool. Keep your back straight, lean forward at the hips. Do not bend at the waist.

## Position for reaching

- Use both arms to reach for things
- Do not twist
- Stand on safety step stool with high handrails
- Use a reaching device
- Lift only lightweight objects
- Keep things you use a lot on lower shelves

## Position at bedtime

- Getting into bed – Sit on the side of the bed. Use your hands to lower yourself sideways to the mattress. Avoid twisting or just laying back.
- Getting out of bed – Turn on your side. Use your hands to help you sit up on the edge of the bed. Sit on the edge of the bed for a few minutes before standing up.
- While sleeping try using a pillow between your knees and under your head for better support

## Position when coughing or sneezing

- Place your hand behind your back to support it

## Medication

Osteoporosis cannot be cured but it can be treated. There are medicines that build bone and slow bone loss. But even with medicine, it is important to lead an active life and eat the right foods.

Medicine given for osteoporosis can help build new bone or prevent you from losing too much bone, but they can also cause other symptoms. These include stomach or muscle pain, nausea and heartburn. Some medications may cause overgrowth of bones, but that is usually rare.

### Medicine your doctor may talk to you about:

**Bisphosphonates** are the most common medications used to treat osteoporosis:

- Alendronate (Fosamax)
- Risedronate (Actonel)
- Ibandronate (Boniva)
- Zoledronic Acid (Reclast)

This class of drugs is the most common type of medication prescribed to help prevent and treat osteoporosis. They are prescribed in pill form or as an IV infusion. They help increase hip and spine bone density, reduce bone loss and reduce fractures in the wrist, hip and spine.

They can cause abdominal pain, muscle pain, bone pain, heartburn and nausea.

Bisphosphonates that are given intravenously like ibandronate (Boniva) can be prescribed every 3 months. Bisphosphonates that are given intravenously like zoledronic acid (Reclast) can be given once a year.

Bisphosphonates that are pills must be taken exactly as directed to avoid side effects. Certain medications must be taken first thing in the morning, on an empty stomach with a full (8-ounce) glass of water. They must be taken 30 minutes to one hour before food, before taking other medications and before taking other liquids. Also, certain medications do not permit you to lie down for 30 minutes after taking and require you to remain standing or sitting.

**Calcitonin (Miacalcin)** is a hormone nasal spray. It is sprayed in one nostril each day. It may not be as effective as other medications and it does not prevent osteoporosis. It may slow bone loss and increase bone density in the spine. It can cause nasal irritation, nose bleeds, nasal congestion and a runny nose. Let your doctor know if you get a rash or are allergic to salmon.

**Hormone therapy (Estrogen)** is prescribed in pill or patch form. It can ease post-menopausal symptoms, reduce bone loss and help maintain bone density in the hip and spine. It may cause bloating, weight gain, certain cancers, high blood pressure, breast changes and blood clots in the legs. It is usually used for treatment if you suffer from more than one condition and is not used for osteoporosis alone.

**SERMs or Selective estrogen receptor modulators (Raloxifene-Evista)** comes in pill form. In the body, it acts on estrogen. It helps increase bone density in the hip and spine and slows down bone loss. It may also reduce the risk of spinal fractures. It may cause hot flashes, blood clots in the legs and leg cramps. It is less likely to cause breast cancer but has a risk of heart problems.

**Parathyroid Hormone – Teriparatide (Forteo)** is a daily self-injected shot that is used for broken bones in the back. It can be used for up to 24 months. It may cause leg cramps or leg pain, nausea, dizziness and injection site reactions.

### **Parathyroid Hormone – Abaloparatide (Tymlos)**

increases bone mass and strength and is used to prevent bone fracture. It is a daily injectable under the skin. It may cause skin rash, blood in the urine, low blood pressure, nausea and vomiting, low blood pressure, rapid heart rate and fatigue.

**RANKL inhibitor (RANK or Receptor activator of nuclear factor kappa-B) – Denosumab (Prolia)** is injected under the skin and given every 6 months. It is given by a health care professional in a clinic or hospital setting. It can slow bone breakdown. It may cause skin irritation, breathing problems, irregular heartbeat, muscle spasms, stomach pain and lightheadedness.

Talk to your doctor to see if you should take medicine for your osteoporosis. Together with your doctor you will decide which medicine is best for you.

## **Fall prevention**

Falls are not a normal part of getting old and protecting yourself from falls is important at any age. It is very important for people with osteoporosis because it is easier to break a bone due to a fall.

### **Protect yourself**

- Use a cane or walker if needed
- Stay active to improve strength and balance
- Have your hearing checked every year
- Have your eyes checked every year
- Ask your doctor if any of the medicine you take can cause you to fall
- Wear shoes that support your feet and fit well
- Carry a shoulder bag or backpack to keep your hands free

## **Make your home safe from falls**

- Get rid of the clutter on floor and stairs
- Keep all cords bundled and out of the way
- Remove throw rugs
- Use night lights in your bedroom, hallways and bathroom
- Keep stairways well lit
- Use handrails when going up or down stairs
- Install handrails around the bathtub and toilet
- Use a strong shower chair to sit on when showering
- If your toilet is low, use a raised toilet seat
- Use grasping devices to pick things up from the floor or reaching above your head
- Place bright colored tape on the edge of the steps
- Fix broken steps and sidewalks
- Clean spills when they happen
- Use a step stool that has high handle bars
- Keep your telephone by your bed that you can easily reach
- Keep a flash light by your bed
- If you use an electric blanket, keep the cord off the floor
- Ask for help to clear your side walk of snow and ice
- Watch for curbs when crossing the street

## **Medicine and fall prevention**

Some medicines may make you feel dizzy or lose stability in your hands or feet. Medications that may cause these symptoms are usually blood pressure, sleep or heart medications.

If you do not understand some of your medications or have questions, don't be afraid to ask your doctor. These simple steps may help:

- Bring all your medications with you to each doctor's visit, whether they're in a pill box or the prescription bottle
- Ask your doctor what each pill is for and why you are taking it. Write down that information
- Write down instructions on how to take each medication
- Mark which medications may cause dizziness or unbalance

## What can you do for pain without medicine?

- Heat and ice – Heat helps with long-lasting pains, as well as stiff muscles. Ice helps with more immediate pains or bruises, like swelling and numbing nerves. Put heat or ice on any painful area a few times a day for 15 – 20 minutes each time
- Back supports – These types of supports help with pain by controlling your movement. Wearing a back support all the time is not the best idea. Ask your doctor how long you should wear your support
- Be active – This will help with stiff muscles and swelling that causes pain. It will also help keep muscles strong. Sometimes your doctor will have you work with a physical therapist. They can teach you moves that will relax sore muscles and help with healing
- Massage therapy – This increases the blood flow and warming to the area of pain. It helps relax stiff muscles. If you have osteoporosis in the back, avoid deep muscle massages
- Relaxation training – This will teach you how to take control of what you feel. By paying attention to your body you can learn to let go of the tension in your muscles making the pain better
- Visual imagery – When you feel happy or excited, your body doesn't feel pain as much. This happens because of signals sent to your brain. Visual imagery teaches you to control these feelings that change your brain so you can control your pain
- Acupuncture and acupressure – Works with the nerves in your body to take pain away. It also helps build your ability to withstand pain

## Always remember

Osteoporosis is a condition that affects both women and men. The good news is that with simple lifestyle changes or treatments, you can improve or prevent it. For those suffering from osteoporosis or weakened bones, it is important to think about the safety precautions and lifestyle changes outlined in this guide. A few reminders:

- Avoid falls at home by cleaning up clutter, turning on lights at night and removing throw rugs
- Practice good body position to keep your muscles strong. Pay attention to your body positions throughout the day and correct it as you go
- Eat foods rich in calcium and vitamin D
- Stay active
- Limit alcohol intake. Alcohol is a major cause of bone loss and is toxic to bones.
- Limit caffeine intake
- Do not smoke or use tobacco. Smoking increases your chances of osteoporosis by reducing bone mass. The chemicals found in tobacco affect your vitamin D level and lowers the amount of calcium you can pull from the food you eat. If you need help quitting a tobacco habit, call us at 866-415-7138 for more information or to enroll in our tobacco cessation program.

***If you are just not sure you have osteoporosis and something in your body does not feel right, talk to your doctor or health manager about getting a screening.***

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Civil Rights Grievance Coordinator  
Geisinger Health Plan Appeals Department  
100 North Academy Avenue,  
Danville, PA 17822-3220  
Phone: (866) 577-7733, PA Relay 711,  
Fax: (570) 271-7225, or  
Email: [GHPCivilRights@thehealthplan.com](mailto:GHPCivilRights@thehealthplan.com)

The Bureau of Equal Opportunity  
Room 223, Health and Welfare Building,  
P.O. Box 2675,  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2675  
Phone: (717) 787-1127, PA Relay 711,  
Fax: (717) 772-4366, or  
Email: [RA-PWBEOAO@pa.gov](mailto:RA-PWBEOAO@pa.gov)

You can file a complaint in person or by mail, fax, or email. If you need help filing a complaint, Geisinger Health Plan and the Bureau of Equal Opportunity are available to help you.

You can also file a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights electronically through the Office for Civil Rights Complaint Portal, available at <https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/portal/lobby.jsf>, or by mail or phone at:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,  
200 Independence Avenue SW.,  
Room 509F, HHH Building,  
Washington, DC 20201  
1-800-368-1019, 800-537-7697 (TDD)

Complaint forms are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/office/file/index.html>.

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**ATENCIÓN:** Si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 800-447-4000 (PA RELAY: 711).

**ВНИМАНИЕ:** Если вы говорите на русском языке, то вам доступны бесплатные услуги перевода. Звоните 800-447-4000 (PA RELAY: 711).

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ملحوظة: إذا كنت تتحدث اذكر اللغة، فإن خدمات المساعدة اللغوية تتوافر لك بالمجان. اتصل برقم 800-447-4000 (رقم هاتف الصم والبكم: PA RELAY: 711).

**ध्यान दिनुहोस्:** तपाईंले नेपाली बोल्नुहुन्छ भने तपाईंको निम्ति भाषा सहायता सेवाहरू निःशुल्क रूपमा उपलब्ध छ ।  
**फोन गर्नुहोस् 800-447-4000 (PA RELAY: 711) ।**

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**ATTENTION:** Si vous parlez français, des services d'aide linguistique vous sont proposés gratuitement. Appelez le 800-447-4000 (PA RELAY: 711).

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**सुचना:** જો તમે ગુજરાતી બોલતા હો, તો નિ:શુલ્ક ભાષા સહાય સેવાઓ તમારા માટે ઉપલબ્ધ છે. ફોન કરો 800-447-4000 (PA RELAY: 711).







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**Keystone** **ACO**