

Are You at Risk for Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes weak bones. This increases the risk of fractures.

What are the signs of osteoporosis?

Usually, the only symptom is a broken bone. Other noticeable signs can include height loss and curvature of the spine that occur slowly over time. Osteoporosis can cause many changes that you probably won't notice on your own but that can be identified through screening tests. It is important for people who may be at risk for osteoporosis to be screened. If osteoporosis is found, treatment should be started to avoid bone fractures.

Who is at risk?

The National Osteoporosis Foundation publishes standard risk factors. You may be at increased risk if you:

- are female or of advanced age;
- have a hormone deficiency (testosterone in men or estrogen in women);
- are a woman who had early menopause (before age 45);
- use certain medications, such as steroids or anti-seizure drugs, or take too many supplements for thyroid or vitamin A;
- eat a diet low in calcium;
- are inactive or immobile;
- smoke or use alcohol excessively;
- have parents or siblings with osteoporosis;

- have certain medical conditions, including diabetes, cystic fibrosis, malabsorption syndromes, some genetic diseases, kidney disease, thyroid disease, bulimia, or anorexia;
- have a thin body and small bone frame; or
- are white or Asian (although members of other races can also be affected).

How can I prevent osteoporosis?

Your bones grow and achieve their peak bone mass in your youth and up to age 35. During this time, you can make your bones as strong as possible by eating a healthful diet and exercising regularly.

If you are beyond age 35, you can help prevent bone loss by getting enough calcium and vitamin D, performing weight-bearing exercises, and maintaining an overall healthy lifestyle. Speak to your health care provider about the right amount of calcium and vitamin supplements for you.

It is also important to reduce your risk of bone fractures by preventing falls. Wear sturdy shoes, make sure your daily environment is safe, and wear hip pads if you know you already have bone loss.

How can I be tested for osteoporosis?

Bone mineral density testing provides an easy and accurate measure of your risk for osteoporosis.

Common tests include:

- dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA),
- quantitative computed tomography (QCT),
- peripheral DXA or QCT, and
- peripheral heel ultrasound

Your health care provider can provide more information about these tests.

What treatments are available?

Many different drugs are available for treating osteoporosis. Your health care provider can help you decide which one may be right for you. Commonly used drugs include:

- bisphosphonates, such as Actonel (risedronate) or Fosamax (alendronate);
- Miacalcin (a calcitonin nasal spray); and
- Evista (raloxifene)

If you think you may be at risk for developing osteoporosis, talk to your health care provider about getting screened and, if necessary, developing a treatment plan.

