

The Medical Minute: Osteoporosis

May 26 2010, By Edward J. Fox

Osteoporosis is a disease in which bones become thin. As a result, the bones are more likely to break. Bones most often affected are in the hip, spine and wrist, but the ribs and other bones also are at risk.

Nearly 25 million Americans have osteoporosis and most of them are women above the age of 60. Men are also vulnerable to the disease. In the early stages of osteoporosis there are no signs or symptoms, which is why it has the nickname “the silent disease.” The loss of bone progresses gradually until a bone breaks. Other signs are a loss of height and bad posture.

Common Osteoporosis Risk Factors:

- Older than 65 years of age
- Broke a bone after age 50
- Close relative has osteoporosis or has broken a bone
- Health is fair or poor
- Smokes
- Underweight for height
- Started menopause before age 45
- Lack of calcium intake
- Has two or more drinks of alcohol several times per week
- Has poor vision even with glasses
- Sometimes falls
- Not physically active

Patients who have one of the following medical conditions may be prone

to osteoporosis:

- Hyperthyroidism
- Chronic lung disease
- Cancer
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Chronic hepatitis or renal disease
- Hyperparathyroidism
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Cushing's Disease
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Rheumatoid arthritis

Patients who take the following medicines may be prone to osteoporosis:

- Oral glucocorticoids (steroids)
- Cancer treatment (radiation, chemotherapy)
- Thyroid medicine
- Antiepileptic medications
- Gonadal hormone suppression
- Immunosuppressive agents

A physician may suggest a bone density scan for patients in a high-risk group to determine if some form of treatment to prevent or treat [osteoporosis](#) is needed. This is especially true for women around menopause when estrogen levels fall. There are several techniques for measuring [bone](#) density, and they are safe and painless.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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