

WHAT IS OSTEOPOROSIS?

Osteoporosis is a disease where bones lose density, become more fragile and break more easily than healthy bones. There is no cure for osteoporosis, but it is preventable and treatable.

Bone is living tissue that is constantly renewing itself by removing old bone and replacing itself with new bone. When the removal of old bone and replacement with new bone are balanced, bone remains healthy and strong. When more bone is removed than replaced a low bone density or osteoporosis results.

Your maximum bone mass, also called peak bone density, is usually achieved in your mid twenties, because up to that time your body is building more bone than it is losing. Each individual's peak bone density is influenced by heredity, diet and exercise patterns throughout the growing years.

With aging, bone loss exceeds bone building. After menopause there is a decrease in estrogen, a protector of bone density. This allows the rate of bone removal to increase. Other factors such as lack of weight-bearing exercise, vitamin D deficiency, a low calcium diet and smoking contribute to bone loss. Certain medications and diseases can also speed the removal of bone.

Fractures due to osteoporosis can affect both men and women. Many fractures occur without pain, particularly in the spine. The most common fracture sites are the spine, hip and forearm, but fractures may be present anywhere in the skeleton. One warning sign of undetected vertebral fractures is unexplained height loss.

Your doctor can order a bone density test called a DXA to check your bone health. This test is fast, painless and requires little x-ray exposure. In addition your spine can be assessed for fractures that you may not be aware of with an additional test called a VFA. This test can be acquired at the same time you are having your bone density test. Detecting the presence of fractures in your spine can be an important factor in determining your treatment.



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