

Are You At Risk For Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to become thin and weak. It is easier for weak bones to fracture or break. Some bone loss is a natural part of aging, and usually begins after the age of 35. However, too much bone loss causes the bone to become thin and brittle, leading to a condition known as osteoporosis. Women are more susceptible if you have a family history of osteoporosis, have had your ovaries removed, are Asian or Caucasian, small-boned, inactive, or past the age of menopause. Remember that men also get osteoporosis.

Symptoms

Osteoporosis takes years to develop and may or may not have symptoms. Some warnings signals include:

- Fractures (hip, wrist, spine)
- Curvature of the upper back
- Loss of height

Prevention

Things that you can do to keep your bones strong:

- Stop smoking
- Limit alcohol
- Limit soft drinks
- Include weight-bearing and resistance exercises to strengthen muscles and improve bone strength. Examples of weight-bearing exercises are walking, jogging, dancing and stair climbing. Examples of resistance exercises are weight lifting using free weights or weight machines.
- Eat foods high in calcium, such as dairy products, firm tofu, canned fish with bones, dark-green leafy vegetables. Consider calcium and vitamin D supplements if necessary.
- Daily exposure to sunlight to help the body make vitamin D needed for the absorption of calcium
- Do exercises that improve your balance so you are less likely to fall, e.g. yoga, tai chi

Treatment

If you are over 50 and/or have gone through menopause, ask your doctor about having a bone density scan. The scan can show how dense, or strong, your bones are. Several new prescription medications are available to treat osteoporosis. Physical therapy may also be an option. Discuss with your doctor to see which may be appropriate for you.

Although osteoporosis is not curable, you can take positive steps to protect your bones starting now.