

# Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a major public health threat for more than 30 million Americans, 80 percent of whom are women. 25 million American women and 5 million men have osteoporosis, and millions more have low bone density. One in every two women and one in eight men over age 50 will have an osteoporosis-related fracture in their lifetime.

## What is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis, or porous bone, is a disease characterized by low bone mass and structural deterioration of bone tissue, leading to bone fragility and an increased susceptibility to fractures of the hip, spine, and wrist. The important factors that affect the development of osteoporosis are:

- ♦ The peak bone mass you attain by about age 30, and
- ♦ The rate at which you lose bone from then on. As you age, more bone is broken down than is reformed, causing loss of density and strength. The rate of bone loss accelerates in women in the first five to seven years after menopause.

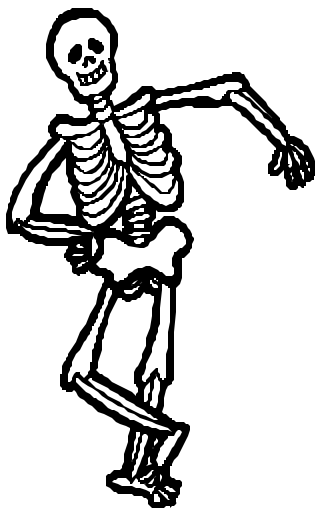
Osteoporosis is often called the "silent disease" because bone loss occurs without symptoms. People may not know that they have osteoporosis until their bones become so weak that a sudden strain, bump, or fall causes a fracture or a vertebra to collapse.

Collapsed vertebrae may initially be felt or seen in the form of severe back pain, loss of height, or spinal deformities such as kyphosis or stooped posture.

## Am I at Risk?

Certain people are more likely to develop osteoporosis than others. Factors that increase the likelihood of developing osteoporosis are called "risk factors." The following risk factors have been identified:

- Being female.
- Having a thin and/or small frame.
- Having an absence of menstrual periods (amenorrhea).
- Having an inactive lifestyle.
- Smoking cigarettes.
- Using alcohol excessively.
- Being Caucasian or Asian, although African Americans and Hispanic Americans are at significant risk as well.
- Having anorexia nervosa or bulimia.
- Eating a diet low in calcium.
- Being of advanced age.
- Having family members with osteoporosis.
- Being postmenopausal, including early or surgically induced menopause, without hormone replacement.
- Using certain medications, such as corticosteroids (Prednisone, for example) and anticonvulsants.
- Having low testosterone levels in men.



Women can lose up to 20% of their bone mass in the 5-7 years following menopause, making them more susceptible to osteoporosis.



## Can It Be Prevented?

By about age 20, the average woman has acquired 98% of her skeletal mass. Building strong bones during childhood and adolescence can be the best defense against developing osteoporosis later. A comprehensive program that can help prevent osteoporosis includes:

- A balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D (see reverse for calcium-rich foods)
- Weight-bearing exercise (walking, jogging, or lifting weights)
- A healthy lifestyle with no smoking or excessive alcohol or soft drink use, and
- Bone density testing and medication when appropriate.

