

PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

Osteoporosis

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WHAT IS OSTEOPOROSIS?

Osteoporosis is a condition in which bones become thinner, weaker, and are more likely to break. Osteoporosis is called a “silent” disease because there are typically no symptoms until a bone is broken. In the absence of broken bones, osteoporosis is typically diagnosed with a DEXA scan, which is a measure of bone density. DEXA scans are recommended for women older than 65 years and men older than 75 years.

Some individuals are at greater risk for developing osteoporosis than others. Risk factors include the following:

- **Age:** As you age, bone loss happens more quickly
- **Sex:** Females have a greater risk than males; however, men are still at risk, especially over the age of 70 years
- **Race:** White and Asian females are at a greater risk, and White males are at a greater risk
- **Lifestyle:** Low physical activity, excessive alcohol consumption, smoking, and diet low in calcium and vitamin D all increase the risk of osteoporosis
- **Changes to hormones:** Females with decreased estrogen and males with decreased testosterone have an increased risk
- **Medications:** Steroids, reflux medications, selective-serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), thiazolidinediones, seizure medications, aromatase inhibitors, and chemotherapy

CAN OSTEOPOROSIS BE PREVENTED?

There are ways to prevent or slow down the progression of osteoporosis including:

- Staying physically active with weight-bearing exercises such as walking
- Drink alcohol in moderation
- Smoking cessation
- Eat a nutritious diet with calcium and vitamin D to maintain bone health

HOW CAN OSTEOPOROSIS BE TREATED?

There are ways to prevent or slow down the progression of osteoporosis including:

- **Exercise:** Weight-bearing exercises are ideal and include walking, climbing stairs (with use of a handrail for stability), yoga or tai chi (to improve balance and decrease risk of falls), and several other options that get you on your feet
- **Lifestyle modifications:** Smoking cessation, limiting alcohol intake to one glass a day for women or two for men, increasing calcium intake with low-fat dairy, fortified cereals or other fortified foods, and dark leafy green vegetables like collard greens and turnips
- **Osteopathic treatment:** Functional joint mobility techniques and soft-tissue techniques can be used by your osteopathic physician to help improve the ability of your body to adapt to movement and possibly decrease pain and functional limitations while improving self-sufficiency and independence

There are medications your doctor can prescribe for you if you meet certain guidelines. These medications help slow the progression of bone loss but do not replace bone you have already lost. It is important to talk to your doctor and start early with lifestyle modifications to decrease your likelihood of developing osteoporosis.

SOURCES

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