Health Basics A-Z

Osteoporosis

WHAT IS OSTEOPOROSIS?
A complex disease, 10 million people currently have osteoporosis, with 34 million others with low bone mass at risk for developing the disease. Osteoporosis is characterized by fragile bones which are more likely to break. Typically, without treatment, those with osteoporosis are at risk for fractures of the hip, spine and wrist, although any bone can be affected.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF OSTEOPOROSIS?
Symptoms of osteoporosis include the following conditions:

- Easily broken bones from minor falls or even simple actions, such as sneezing. In some cases, bones are so weak they may break with no precipitating action.
- Severe back pain, loss of height or spinal deformities, such as a stooped posture may all be caused by spinal fractures.
- Bone loss in menopausal women may cause up to 20 percent loss of bone mass five to seven years after the onset of menopause.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR OSTEOPOROSIS?

- You’re female (although men also get osteoporosis)
- You’re older
- Genetics (Are you small and thin? Do you have a family history of osteoporosis?)
- Ethnicity (Caucasians, Asians, Latinos and African Americans are at risk)
- You have a history of broken bones
- You have a low level of sex hormones
- Diets low in calcium and vitamin D intake and high in protein, sodium and caffeine
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Smoking

- Alcohol abuse
- Use of certain medicines, such as steroid medications and some anticonvulsants, among others
- Certain diseases and conditions, such as anorexia nervosa, rheumatoid arthritis and gastrointestinal diseases, among others

These are the major risk factors, but speak to your doctor, too, as you may have additional ones not listed here.

WHAT IS THE TESTING PROCEDURE FOR OSTEOPOROSIS?
Currently, a bone mineral density (BMD) test is the only way to detect low bone density and diagnose osteoporosis. The lower your bone mineral density is, the greater your risk of having a fracture.

WHAT ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR OSTEOPOROSIS?
The following treatment options are recommended as effective ways to treat osteoporosis:

- Medication
- Weight-bearing exercise
- Daily vitamin supplementation with 1,200 mg of calcium and 800-1,000 International Units (IU) of vitamin D.

Speak to your doctor about which treatment option or combination of treatment options might work best for you. In addition, visit the National Osteoporosis Foundation at www.nof.org for more information and educational materials on the causes, prevention, detection and treatment of osteoporosis.

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