



What is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a condition where a person gradually loses bone material especially calcium, so that the bones become gradually more fragile and brittle.

What causes Osteoporosis?

As middle age approaches most of us gradually begin to lose minerals from our bones, so they become less dense. This loss or thinning of the bones continues as we get older and become less mobile.

This process speeds up more in women after the menopause. This is caused by a reduction in the oestrogen produced by the ovaries. Some people are more at risk in developing osteoporosis than others:

- ❖ Oestrogen deficiency. Early menopause (before 45), from a hysterectomy or drugs.
- ❖ Lack of exercise. Exercise keeps the bones strong. Long illness and bedrest speeds up the process of osteoporosis.
- ❖ Poor diet. A diet which does not contain enough calcium (in an absorbable form) can encourage osteoporosis.
- ❖ Gastric disorders. Certain disorders of the stomach and gut may cause reduced absorption of nutrients including calcium e.g. low stomach acid.
- ❖ Heavy smoking. Tobacco lowers the oestrogen level in women and may also cause early menopause.
- ❖ Heavy drinking. High alcohol intake reduces the ability of the body to make bone.
- ❖ Water tablets. Some diuretics (used to lower blood pressure) may cause the loss of calcium in the urine.
- ❖ Having breast-fed several children.
- ❖ Family history. Osteoporosis tends to run in some families.

- ❖ Previous fractures. This may indicate a weakness in bones especially if the spine or hips are affected.
- ❖ Small stature/skeleton. Small, slender people may be more at risk as their mineral stock is small to start off with and as they get older any loss of calcium is more apparent. Being heavy or weight-bearing ironically helps stimulate bone.
- ❖ Other possible causes are: High protein diet, too many sweets, lactose deficiency, stomach ulcer, stress, pregnancies and lactation, heavy periods, thyroid/parathyroid problems, steroids and other drugs, antibiotics, poor sunlight, poor water, some vitamin deficiencies ie Vit C, D, sodium fluoride and magnesium.

What can you do to prevent or slow down osteoporosis?

Unfortunately, if you are already suffering from advanced osteoporosis there is very little you can do to reverse or change this situation especially if you are over 70. So, prevention is better than cure for this disorder.

- ✓ Have a healthy diet. Eat lots of milk-based products which are low in fat (if milk does not upset your stomach). Other foods: Fish, bread, seeds esp sesame/tahini, low fat Greek/strained yoghurt, green vegetables and salads with lots of lemon juice, brown rice.
- ✓ To increase the absorption of calcium you need an acidic stomach environment:
 - Yogurt is acidic therefore its calcium is better absorbed.
 - As much as possible eat calcium-rich foods with a lot of lemon juice or cider vinegar.
 - Take your calcium supplements with something acidic e.g. orange juice and not with milk. Milk is alkaline.
- ✓ Take regular supplements with calcium and vitamin D. Cheap calcium carbonate formulations when taken in excess may contribute to kidney stones or cause hardening of the arteries. For the most suitable formulation please consult us or a professional.
- ✓ Take regular exercise



- ✓ Stop smoking
 - ✓ Drink in moderation
 - ✓ If you have an early menopause speak to your doctor. HRT may be one of the options you can consider but there are risks as well as benefits and you must discuss these with your doctor. You may also need to undergo regular check-ups to screen for certain cancers.
 - ✓ If you cannot take HRT, there are some natural plant remedies which may help to stimulate or mimic your hormones. For these you will need to see a qualified therapist such as a Nutritionist, an Herbalist, or a Naturopath. (If you need further advice please make an appointment to consult one of our therapists at the Bloomsbury Practice).
 - ✓ If you already have osteoporosis you may be advised to take drugs such as; Etidronate (Didronel), Alendronate (Fosamax) and to combine these with Calcium & Vit D.
 - ✓ For more severe forms of osteoporosis there are special medications such as Calcitonin-analogues and others but these must be prescribed by a specialist if they think you need them.
- ❖ Generalised aches and pains
 - ❖ Constant back pain
 - ❖ An abnormal curve in your back or loss of height
 - ❖ Bone fractures following an apparent minor injury
 - ❖ Muscle spasms
 - ❖ Or any of the conditions mentioned above.

Finally...

Leading an active healthy life and maintaining a diet high in calcium (in an absorbable form) is the best way of preventing osteoporosis.

Taking regular exercises is possibly the best policy in the long term. However, not all exercises are equally beneficial for osteoporosis. There are certain forms of exercises that are more beneficial, but some other exercises may expose you to risk of fractures or arthritis.

If you are not sure how to go about setting up an exercise or nutritional programme speak to a qualified practitioner. At our practice we have a team of Osteopaths, Physiotherapists, Nutritional Therapists, Herbalists, and other specialisms. All our therapists in these fields are experienced university graduates who are competent and insured to help you lead a healthy and active life.

How do you know if you have osteoporosis?

Unfortunately, in most cases you cannot tell that you have osteoporosis until it becomes severe or fast progressing and by this stage it may be too late to reverse the damage. If you are in a high-risk group (i.e. in one of the above categories) then you may ask your GP to send you to a hospital for a special bone density scan, such as DEXA.

A bone density scan will tell you the state of your bones such as your lumbar vertebrae (spine), your hips or other parts of your skeleton. What is important is not just to see the current state of your bone density but to compare this with a future scan in say 1-2 years' time to see how it may have progressed.

If you have any of the following, then you may also suspect osteoporosis and you should seek advice:

Disclaimer: If you suffer from a medical condition seek professional advice. The information provided here is not intended as a diagnosis or treatment. The authors will not be held responsible for any claims that may arise as a result of using this information.

© Andreas Syrimis
Bloomsbury Practice
99 Judd Street, London, WC1H 9JB
Tel 020 7387 9777
www.bloomsburyhealthcentre.co.uk

