

Factors that Put You at Risk

Certain people are more likely to develop osteoporosis than others. Factors that increase your chances of having osteoporosis are called “risk factors.” While you have no control over some risk factors, there are others you can change. By making healthier choices you can help reduce your risk of osteoporosis as well as the painful broken bones it can cause.

It’s also important to discuss your risk factors with your healthcare provider. Together, you can develop a plan to protect your bones.

Risk Factors That Are Difficult to Change

- **Age.** Osteoporosis can affect people of all ages, but it is far more common in older people than younger people. All of us lose some bone density as we age, but some of us lose more bone or lose it faster. It is not true that every older person gets osteoporosis, but it does become more common with age.
- **Sex.** About one in two women over the age of 50 will break a bone because of osteoporosis. A woman’s risk of breaking a hip due to osteoporosis is equal to her risk of breast, ovarian and uterine cancer combined. Women have lighter, thinner bones than men. Many women also lose bone quickly after menopause.

However, osteoporosis isn’t just a woman’s disease. Up to one in four men over the age of 50 will break a bone because of osteoporosis. A man older than age 50 is more likely to break a bone due to osteoporosis than he is to get prostate cancer.

- **Menopause.** In women, the sex hormone estrogen protects bones. For many women, bone loss increases after menopause when estrogen levels drop sharply. If you go through menopause early, your risk of osteoporosis increases. The same is true if you have your ovaries removed. That’s because your ovaries produce most of your body’s estrogen. In either of these cases, it’s important to speak with your healthcare provider about steps to improve bone health.
- **Family History.** Research suggests that heredity and genetics play a major role in osteoporosis and broken bones. If either of your parents had osteoporosis or a history of broken bones, you are more likely to break a bone. Also, if one of your parents had a noticeable amount of height loss or a spine that curved forward, they may have had broken bones in the spine.
- **Low Body Weight/Being Small and Thin.** Women and men with small bones are more likely than larger people to have osteoporosis. But that doesn’t mean heavier or larger people can’t get it.
- **Broken Bones or Height Loss.** People who have broken one or more bones during their adult years may already have osteoporosis and not know it. Broken bones in the spine can occur with no noticeable pain. These breaks can cause height loss. They can also cause the spine to curve forward. This curvature of the spine is sometimes called a dowager’s hump or kyphosis. Breaks in the spine often go unnoticed until a person becomes aware that a significant loss of height of an inch or more has occurred.



Lifestyle Factors That Affect Bone Health

- **Not Getting Enough Calcium and Vitamin D.** Calcium is a mineral that is important for healthy bones. It is a building block of bone. Vitamin D is important because it helps your body use calcium. If you don’t get enough vitamin D or if your body does not absorb it well, you are at much greater risk for bone loss and osteoporosis.

According to NOF recommendations:

- **Adults under age 50** need a total of 1,000 milligrams (mg) of calcium from all sources* and 400 - 800 international units (IU) of vitamin D every day.
- **Adults age 50 and older** need a total of 1,200 mg of calcium from all sources* and 800 - 1,000 IU of vitamin D every day.

*This includes the total amount of calcium you get from both food and supplements.

- **Not Eating Enough Fruits and Vegetables.** Eating a well-balanced diet, rich in fruits and vegetables, is important for healthy bones. In addition to calcium and vitamin D, magnesium, potassium and vitamin K are a few of the many minerals and vitamins that are important for bone health.

If you eat a well-balanced diet, experts believe that you should be able to get enough of the nutrients needed for healthy bones. Most experts recommend multivitamins or supplements for people who do not get enough minerals and vitamins from foods. This includes people who have gastrointestinal disorders that can interfere with the absorption of vitamins and minerals.

- **Getting Too Much Protein, Sodium and Caffeine.** Diets that are extremely high in non-dairy sources of animal protein, sodium and caffeine may cause the body to lose calcium. Eating enough protein, however, is important for bone health. Bone loss may occur in people who eat special “high protein” diets. Having moderate amounts of caffeine each day from coffee and tea should not harm bone health. Studies, however, suggest that people who regularly drink cola drinks may be at greater risk of bone loss. Other non-cola carbonated soft drinks do not appear to have these same risks.

You can help make up for the potential loss of calcium from sodium, excessive protein, too much caffeine and cola drinks by making sure you get enough calcium every day.



- **Having an Inactive Lifestyle.** People who are bedridden, inactive or do not exercise are at high risk of osteoporosis. Certain types of regular exercise can help keep your bones strong. These include weight-bearing exercises such as fast walking and muscle-strengthening exercises such as lifting weights.
- **Smoking.** Smoking is harmful to your bones in many ways. The chemicals in cigarettes are bad for your bone cells. Smoking also might make it harder to absorb calcium. For women, smoking can prevent estrogen from protecting the bones.
- **Drinking too much alcohol.** Drinking heavily can reduce bone formation. Many people who drink too much do not get enough calcium. Drinking may also affect the body's calcium supply.

In addition, drinking too much is bad for your overall health and can make you more likely to fall. This is how many people break bones. Alcohol in smaller amounts, however, does not harm bone health. This usually means no more than two - three drinks a day.

- **Losing Weight.** While losing weight can help prevent other health conditions like heart disease and diabetes, it can also cause bone loss. You can protect your bones while losing weight by exercising and eating a healthy diet that provides enough calcium and vitamin D.

Medical Conditions That May Cause Bone Loss

In addition, there are many health problems and medications that can harm your bones and increase your risk of osteoporosis. Visit the links below for detailed information.

Additional Related Topics

[Medicines that May Cause Bone Loss](#) ^[1] - information about medicines that may cause bone loss.

[Diseases and Conditions that May Cause Bone Loss](#) ^[2] - information medical conditions that may bone loss.

National Osteoporosis Foundation
Copyright © 2011 All Rights Reserved

1150 17th Street, NW Suite 850
Washington, DC 20036

1 (800) 231-4222 TEL | 1 (202) 223-2237 FAX

[Privacy Policy](#)
[Legal Disclaimer](#)
[Medical Disclaimer](#)
[Reprint Policy](#)

[Shop NOF](#)
[Contact NOF](#)
[Problems with the site](#)
[Site Index A-Z](#)

Follow NOF on



[Click here to stay up to date on osteoporosis and NOF's efforts.](#)

Source URL: <http://www.nof.org/aboutosteoporosis/bonebasics/riskfactors>

Links:

[1] <http://www.nof.org/node/232>

[2] <http://www.nof.org/node/233>