

OSTEOPOROSIS: Are You at Risk?

You are the one who put me together inside my mother's body, and I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me. *Psalm 139: 13 – 14 CEV*

May is Osteoporosis prevention month and here is what you should know about this bone condition.

What is osteoporosis?

It is a debilitating disease in which bones become fragile and are more likely to break. In most cases, it can be prevented and treated but if steps are not taken, it progresses painlessly until bones break.

Osteoporosis is a major health threat for an estimated 44 million Americans. Currently in the US, ten million folks have osteoporosis and 34 million more have low bone mass placing them at increased risk for developing this disease. Eighty (80%) of those affected are women BUT, men comprise the other 20% with the condition.

The consequences of osteoporosis are devastating. Each year in the US this disease leads to 1.5 million fractures, mostly of the hip, spine and wrist, although any bone can be affected.

Are You at Risk?

Several factors can increase your chances of developing osteoporosis:

- * Gender – women are more apt to develop this condition because of a decrease in estrogen production that occurs during menopause.
- * Age – the longer you live, the greater the chances of developing osteoporosis.
- * Family History – heredity is a major factor. If you have had a bone fracture as an adult or a parent has had a fracture, you are more apt to have osteoporosis.
- * Ethnicity – Caucasian and Asian women are at highest risk; African-American and Hispanic women are at lower (but significant) risk.
- * Body Size – low body weight (under 127 lbs) and a small-boned frame are at increased risk.
- * Lifestyle – a diet low in calcium, inadequate vitamin D, little or no exercise, smoking or excess use of alcohol are all risk factors for this debilitating disease.

Diagnosing Osteoporosis – to determine if you have osteoporosis or may be at risk for the disease, talk to your physician, who will ask you questions about your lifestyle, medical history and whether anyone in your family suffered from osteoporosis or if they have had fractured bones. If you are found to be at risk specialized tests, called bone density tests (x-rays of the hip), can measure the thickness/thinness of bones and provide a diagnosis, from which a treatment plan (usually medications) can be developed.

For more detailed information contact: The National Osteoporosis Foundation, in Washington, DC, at 202-223-2226 or www.nof.org.