



Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes very weak bones that break easily.

What causes osteoporosis?

In women, osteoporosis is often caused by bone loss that occurs with low levels of estrogen that come with menopause. Estrogen plays an important role in building and maintaining your bones. After menopause, your body makes very little estrogen.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can get osteoporosis, but it is about **four times more common in women than men**. You may be more likely to get osteoporosis if you:

- Are female
- Are over age 50
- Smoke
- Have a slim, thin body
- Have family members who had osteoporosis
- Do not get enough weight-bearing exercise, such as walking
- Drink alcohol (more than 3 drinks a day)
- Have certain other medical conditions or take certain medicines for a long time



How do I know if I have osteoporosis?

People with osteoporosis typically do not have symptoms until they break a bone. There are tests that use either x-rays or ultrasound (sound waves) to measure bone density. These tests are painless. Ask your health care provider when you should be tested.

- X-ray tests, called DXA scans, examine your spine, hip, and/or wrist. DXA scans use a very small amount of radiation.
- Ultrasound tests the condition of the bone but is not used alone to diagnose osteoporosis. You will still need a DXA scan to diagnose osteoporosis.

How is osteoporosis treated?

There is no way to cure osteoporosis. There are things you can do to have stronger bones. Talk with your health care provider about making a plan to keep your bones healthy.

Clinical trials can help health care providers learn more about treatments for osteoporosis. Visit the [Women in Clinical Trials](#) webpage to learn more about how you can participate.

Lifestyle changes

You can make lifestyle changes to lower your risk of osteoporosis.

- Stay physically active. Do weight-bearing exercise like walking
- Do not smoke
- Limit alcohol use
- Get enough calcium and vitamin D in your diet. Your health care provider may suggest taking calcium and vitamin D pills

Dietary supplements

Dietary supplements are products that people add to their diets. They include vitamins, like vitamin D, and minerals, such as calcium, important for bone health.

Talk with your health care provider before you take any dietary supplements. These may affect your other medicines.

Prescription medicines

There are prescription medicines that you can take. These medicines come as a pill, a nasal spray, or a shot (injection).

The following types of medicines can help treat osteoporosis. Most, but not all, of these medicines have been shown to reduce the risk of bone fracture.

- Bisphosphonates
- Parathyroid hormone (PTH) analogs
- RANKL inhibitor
- Sclerostin inhibitors
- Calcitonin analogs
- Selective Estrogen Receptor Modulators (SERMs)

Talk with your health care provider about which medicine is right for you. **You should also talk about the risks, benefits, and side effects before you start or stop a medicine.**

How do I prevent osteoporosis?

To help prevent osteoporosis, focus on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Building strong bones during childhood and the teen years is important to help prevent osteoporosis later in life.

Talk with your health care provider for advice on osteoporosis prevention based on your age, health, and risk factors.



This fact sheet was developed by the **FDA Office of Women's Health**. This information is for educational purposes, not all inclusive and should not be used in place of talking with your health care provider.

To learn more, go to: www.fda.gov/womens

