

# Keeping Your Bones Healthy

In older adults, the cause of fractures (broken bones) is most often osteoporosis (OSS-tee-oh-por-OH-siss). Osteoporosis is a disease that thins and weakens bones, making it easier for them to break. Women are at greater risk than men. The risk of osteoporosis increases with age.

There is a test that tells how strong a person's bones are. It tells whether a person has osteoporosis. This X-ray test is called a "bone density test." It is safe and does not cause pain. This test takes about 5 minutes. An older person who has had a fracture should ask about getting a bone density test. People 65 or older should check with their doctor about the test. A person whose test shows osteoporosis can take drugs to slow the effects of the disease. This lowers the chances of another fracture.

Fractures in older adults are serious:

- They can take longer to heal than those in younger people.
- An older person whose movement is limited is at higher risk for pressure sores (bedsores).



- A fracture can make it much harder for an older person to do daily activities.
- The decrease in strength and balance caused by fracture can take away an older person's independence.

While a fracture heals, an older patient may need to stay in a rehabilitation ("rehab") center. A patient whose fracture was caused by osteoporosis may also be given drugs to help strengthen bones. These drugs come in pill form, a nasal spray, and as injections.

**Close to 1.5 million people a year have a bone fracture due to osteoporosis.**

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Patients who have osteoporosis or have suffered an osteoporosis-related fracture are urged to:

- Get at least 1200 mg of calcium a day (use supplements if necessary)
- Take 400-800 IU of vitamin D a day
- Start a doctor-approved exercise program for ongoing weight-bearing exercise (walking, jogging, dancing, and tennis) and muscle-strengthening exercise
- Avoid smoking
- Limit alcohol to 1-2 drinks a day
- Take any osteoporosis medicine their doctor has prescribed

Doing all of these things together will make treatment more effective.

**Doctors no longer use hormone replacement or estrogen replacement therapy as a main treatment for osteoporosis in women. Health risks have been found with these therapies.**

When an older adult leaves a rehab center to go home, family and friends will need to make safety checks:

- Remove things that can cause tripping. These include loose rugs, electrical and phone cords, and clutter.
- Install tub and toilet hand railings.
- Replace low-level lighting with brighter light bulbs.
- Place night lights in bedrooms, halls, and bathrooms.
- Move often-used items to make them easier to reach.
- Use tools from the rehab center.
- Consider an at-home monitoring service.
- Follow the advice of the therapists and nurses at the rehab center.

All medicines should be reviewed by the doctor to make sure patients are not taking any drugs that cause dizziness. There are many medicines that increase the risk of falling.