

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT OSTEOPOROSIS

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is also called “low bone mass” or “bone loss”. This condition causes bones to become thin and weak. The bones can then break more easily. There is **no pain** from osteoporosis.

What causes osteoporosis?

There is **no one** cause of osteoporosis.

What are the risk factors?

However, if you mark (✓) any of the risk factors below, you may have more chance of bone loss:

- _____ You are a man or woman aged 65 or older.
- _____ You are of Caucasian or Asian ancestry.
- _____ You are a woman past menopause who does not take hormones.
- _____ You are short, thin, and have small bones.
- _____ Your diet does **not** include much milk, cheese, or yogurt and you do **not** take calcium pills.
- _____ You smoke now or in the past.

How do I know if I might have osteoporosis?

- You have **broken a bone** (for example: arm, wrist, hip, leg) **after age 40**
- You are at least 2 inches (5 cm) **shorter** than you used to be.
- An **x-ray** of your chest or other body area has shown that you have thin bones
- A **bone density test** (ordered by your doctor) shows that you have thin bones

How can I keep my bones strong?

- Calcium helps to keep your bones strong. Your body needs **1500 mg of calcium per day**. In your diet, that is about 4 servings of milk, cheese or yogurt each day. You may need to take calcium pills if you do not use dairy foods. Talk to your pharmacist or doctor about calcium pills.
- You need **800 to 1,000 IU vitamin D** each day. **Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium**. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about vitamin D pills.
- Try to do weight-bearing exercise (such as walking) every day.
- Drink only 1–2 cups of coffee or tea each day.
- Do not smoke.
- Your doctor may prescribe medicine if you have broken a bone, or a bone density test shows you have thin bones.

When should I ask my doctor about a bone density test or medicine for my bones?

- If you are **65** years or older, and **have not had a bone density test**
- If you **have broken a bone after age 40**. You may need a bone density test **and** medicine.
- If you have **2 or more of the risk factors**.

Where can I get more information?

For questions about your osteoporosis, please talk to your doctor.

To speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling: Calgary Health Link at 403-943-LINK(5465) or toll free at 1-866-408-LINK(5465). Mandarin Health Link 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link 403-943-1556

Source: Written by Patricia Hodgins, Nurse Clinician, Osteoporosis Centre, Alberta Health Services – Calgary Health Region.

Published November 2008