

# What Can We Do To Prevent Osteoporosis?



Osteoporosis is an age-related condition in which the bones become so porous and weak that they can break from a minor injury. Fractures most often occur at the spine, hip and wrist. The prevalence of osteoporosis is approximately 10 million people in the United States with 34 million people being at risk. Osteoporosis affects women more than men, however 30% of all hip fractures occur in men. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, a woman's risk of hip fracture is equal to her combined risk of breast, uterine and ovarian cancer.

**Exercise helps to retain bone mass, improve strength and balance. When you begin an exercise program, start slow and build up.**

crease animal protein because meat causes an increase in the excretion of calcium. A vegetarian diet with fish seems to be most effective.

Some vegetarian sources of protein include tofu, tempeh, amaranth, barley, quinoa, lentils, whole beans, cottage cheese, nuts, seeds and protein powder to name a few. I would recommend reducing coffee intake to two cups per day as some studies suggest coffee accelerates bone

loss. Tea even with caffeine appears to be safe. Foods which have high calcium content such as dark leafy greens need to be included in your diet. Fish and essential fatty acids improve the strength of bone and increase calcium absorption.

How much calcium should I take? What about Vitamin D? Calcium helps to maintain bone mass and reduce the risk of fractures. It is also important in muscle contraction, release of neurotransmitters and the

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*All's Well*  
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by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND

Who is at risk for osteoporosis? Older women with a family history of osteoporosis, who have fractures after age 50, are at the highest risk. Certain chronic conditions that increase the risk of osteoporosis include anorexia nervosa, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes and gastrointestinal diseases. Women who go through early menopause, i.e. less than 45, or who have low sex hormones place a woman at risk. Men who have low levels of testosterone are also at risk. Risk factors that can be changed include smoking, alcohol intake greater than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men, excessive intake of coffee, animal protein, low calcium intake, vitamin D deficiency, and inadequate exercise.

How is osteoporosis diagnosed? The DXA (dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry) has been used to diagnose osteoporosis. The diagnosis is based on T-Scores. A T score between -1 and -2.5 is considered osteopenia (bone mass or bone mineral density lower than normal). A T score of -2.5 or lower is considered osteoporosis. A score of -2.5 and a fragility fracture is considered severe osteoporosis. Fractures increase in the fourth decade of life and continue with age. Most recently, the FRAX is being used to predict the probability that an individual will experience a fracture in the four major areas (spine, forearm, hip, shoulder) over the next 10 years. This tool is available on line at the following address: [www.shef.ac.uk/FRAX](http://www.shef.ac.uk/FRAX). Go ahead and check your risk. There is a place for your DXA score however you can still use the tool if you do not have that score.

What lifestyle factors can I implement to increase bone mass? Exercise helps to retain bone mass, improve strength and balance. When you begin an exercise program, start slow and build up. Weight bearing or strength exercise along with aerobic exercise appears to be most beneficial.

Food does affect our bones. It is essential that we eat protein and at the same time de-



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