

# OSTEOPOROSIS

## *the silent thief*

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**O**steoporosis is a disease characterized by low bone mass and deterioration of bone tissue. This results in bone fragility and an elevated risk of fractures, especially of the hip and spine. People call osteoporosis *'the silent thief'* because bone loss occurs without symptoms. Don't mix up osteoporosis and osteoarthritis: osteoporosis is a bone disease; osteoarthritis is a disease of the joints and surrounding tissue.

### PREVALENCE

The results of a survey of the World Health Organisation showed that osteoporosis is a leading healthcare problem after cardiovascular diseases. It affects nearly 50% of all women of 60 years and older. That means 200 million women worldwide. There are still lots of people not diagnosed because of a lack of awareness.

Osteoporosis does not develop overnight. You can lose bone mass steadily for many years without having any symptoms until a bone fractures. Seventy percent of the hip fractures is related to osteoporosis. When osteoporosis is first diagnosed at the time you get a fracture, it is already advanced.

When osteoporosis is getting worse it can result in disfigurement, low self-esteem, diminished mobility, followed by decreased independence.

### ARE YOU AT RISK TO GET OSTEOPOROSIS?

There are certain factors playing an important role in the development of osteoporosis. Several are more important than others. To find out your exact risk to get or to have osteoporosis you can easily do a very short assessment of osteoporosis at [www.shef.ac.uk/FRAX/](http://www.shef.ac.uk/FRAX/) This is a calculation tool for women and men between 40 and 90 years from the World Health Organisation.

For those who are not in the mood to do this test I will describe the risk factors:

- Age 65 or older.
- Previous fracture.
- Family history of osteoporotic fracture (especially if your mother had a hip fracture).
- Long-term (more than 3 months continuously) use of glucocorticoid therapy such as prednisone.
- Secondary osteoporosis, due to malabsorption such as celiac disease, Crohn's disease, hypogonadism, malnutrition, chronic liver disease, type 1 diabetes, untreated longstanding hyperthyroidism, osteogenesis imperfecta in adults, premature menopause < 45 years.
- Current smoking.
- Intake of 3 or more units of alcohol daily.
- Rheumatoid arthritis. This is a risk factor for a fracture.
- Low bone mineral density (BMD).

Risk factors are additive, meaning that the more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of developing osteoporosis. If you are over 50 and have at least one of the risk factors ask your physician if you need a bone-mineral-density test (BMD).

This test is safe and painless and accurately measures the density of your bones. A BMD test can tell you whether or not you have osteoporosis and how likely you are to develop it in the future, and could motivate you to change your life style.

If osteoporosis is diagnosed, there are several drug treatments available. The primary aim of the treatment is to reduce fractures. How good your treatment is working can be tested by a bone density test. Usually you will have a test every two to three years.

No matter what drug therapy you choose, remember that a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D is required to maintain healthy bones. The main goal of good calcium nutrition is to maintain an adequate supply so that our bodies do not have to dip into our only calcium reservoir - our bones. Vitamin D3 increases calcium absorption by as much as 30 to 80 percent. Since it may be difficult to get enough vitamin D3 from food alone, it is good to take a supplement.

Physical activity is important to reduce and to treat the osteoporosis. Physical activity assists in building and maintaining healthy bones, improving muscle strength, posture, balance and coordination, and reducing the risk of falls and broken bones (fractures). Physical activity also gives a better quality of life.

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