

## OSTEOPOROSIS

### A SILENT DISEASE

**Building strong bones**, especially before the age of 30, can be the best defense against developing osteoporosis, and a healthy lifestyle can be critically important for keeping bones strong. Osteoporosis is largely preventable for most people. Prevention of this disease is very important because, while there are treatments for osteoporosis, there is currently no cure. There are five steps to prevent osteoporosis. No one step alone is enough to prevent osteoporosis, but all five may.

## 5 STEPS TO BONE HEALTH & OSTEOPOROSIS PREVENTION

### 1. Get your daily recommended amounts of calcium and vitamin D.

Calcium is needed for the heart, muscles and nerves to function properly and for blood to clot.

Inadequate calcium is thought to contribute to the development of osteoporosis. National nutrition surveys have shown that many women and young girls consume less than half the amount of calcium recommended to grow and maintain healthy bones. Experts recommend a daily intake between 400 and 800 IU per day (half in the morning and half at night), which also can be obtained from fortified dairy products, egg yolks, saltwater fish and liver.

Vitamin D is needed for the body to absorb calcium. Without enough vitamin D, you will be unable to absorb calcium from the foods you eat, and your body will have to take calcium from your bones.

Vitamin D comes from two sources: through the skin following direct exposure to sunlight and from the diet. Saltwater fish such as herring, salmon, sardines, and fish liver oils are good sources of vitamin D<sub>3</sub>. Small quantities of vitamin D<sub>3</sub> are also derived from eggs, veal, beef, butter, and vegetable oils.

### 2. Engage in regular weight-bearing exercise.

Exercise is also important to good bone health. If you exercise regularly in childhood and adolescence, you are more likely to reach your peak bone density than those who are inactive. The best exercise for your bones is weight-bearing exercise such as walking, dancing, jogging, stair-climbing, racquet sports and hiking. If you have been sedentary most of your adult life, be sure to check with your healthcare provider before beginning any exercise program.

### 3. Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol

**STOP SMOKING.** Smoking and / or excessive alcohol consumption has a devastating effect on bone health. Smoking impairs muscle, bones and joints health. This means that smokers are at much higher risk of developing osteoporosis.

### 4. Have a bone density test and take medication when appropriate

A Bone Mineral Density test is the only way to diagnose osteoporosis and determine your risk for future fracture. Since osteoporosis can develop undetected for decades until a fracture occurs, early diagnosis is important. A BMD measures the density of your bones (bone mass) and is necessary to determine whether you need medication to help maintain your bone mass, prevent further bone loss and reduce fracture risk.

### 5. Talk to your doctor about bone health

Early detection is the key factor to heading off this disease. Although there is no cure for osteoporosis, there are medications approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the prevention and/or treatment of osteoporosis. Discuss the above preventative steps with your doctor.

## Shhh... a SILENT DISEASE

Osteoporosis is a debilitating disease that can be prevented and treated.

Bones become fragile and more likely to break. If not prevented or if left untreated, osteoporosis can progress painlessly until a bone breaks. These broken bones, also known as fractures, occur typically in the hip, spine, and wrist.

Any bone can be affected, but of special concern are fractures of the hip and spine. A hip fracture almost always requires hospitalization and major surgery. It can impair a person's ability to walk unassisted and may cause prolonged or permanent disability or even death.

Spinal or vertebral fractures also have serious consequences, including loss of height, severe back pain, and deformity.

While women are four times more likely than men to develop the disease, men also suffer from osteoporosis and should be screened.

## LISTEN TO YOUR DOCTOR

Patient compliance is among the biggest hurdles in the osteoporosis battle.

Excellent medications and practices exist for preventing bone loss, but physicians face a big challenge in getting patients to comply with them, experts say. A recent survey found as many as two-thirds of women discontinued medication for postmenopausal osteoporosis within one year, and another study found 40% of hospitalized patients with hip fractures refused to participate in follow-up treatment because they were certain they didn't have osteoporosis.

According to the Foundation for Osteoporosis Research and Education (FORE), 44 million Americans -- 80 percent of them women -- now face the prospect of serious bone loss. Ten million patients are already diagnosed with the illness, while another 34 million suffer from low bone density, which can lead to osteoporosis.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Do you have questions about the information in this newsletter?

**AvMed's Nurse On Call (888-866-5432)** can help answer your questions and provide you with more information.

---

Have you been diagnosed with a high-risk pregnancy, had a catastrophic event or accident, face chronic illness or the challenge of making healthy life style choices?

Talk to your physician about your health condition and **AvMed's Care Management Programs**. For more information, call **AvMed's Member Services** at **800-882-8633**.

---

Would you like to explore reliable and up-to-date, health-related, online resources so you can learn more about your health?

Visit AvMed's Web Site at [www.AvMed.org](http://www.AvMed.org) for a wealth of health information.

### Other online resources:

National Osteoporosis Foundation  
[www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)

National Institute of Health  
[www.osteoo.org](http://www.osteoo.org)

International Osteoporosis Foundation  
[www.osteofound.org](http://www.osteofound.org)

The Osteoporosis Center  
[www.endocrineweb.com/osteoporosis](http://www.endocrineweb.com/osteoporosis)

Health plans with  
**your health**  
in mind.

**AvMED**  
HEALTH PLANS