

Osteoporosis Risk Factors for Women

According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, about 80% of all people diagnosed with osteoporosis are women. While it does affect men, there are unique risk factors that make this a woman's disease. The risk becomes greater as a woman ages, but it can strike at any age. Knowing what the risk factors are is a woman's best defense because this disease is preventable. Here are the risks every woman should know about so she can take steps to prevent or stop bone loss:

- 1.** Women are more susceptible to osteoporosis. This is because women naturally have less dense bones than men and they also tend to be smaller-framed. Women also live longer than men and aging leads to weaker bones.
- 2.** Women are at higher risk for osteoporosis during menopause. As a woman goes through perimenopause, her estrogen levels fluctuate and decline. During menopause, her estrogen levels are very low. Low estrogen means the bones aren't able to replace bone mass as fast as it is lost.
- 3.** Certain medications, treatments and medical conditions increase the risk for women. Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy decrease the estrogen levels and for post-menopausal women, this is doubly bad since their levels are already low. Anti-depressants, corticosteroids and thyroid medication also accelerate bone loss. Women who have or had an eating disorder, rheumatoid arthritis and certain stomach problems can also inhibit bone growth and increase bone loss.
- 4.** Women who don't get enough calcium in their diet put them at risk. For optimal absorption, calcium should be taken with vitamin D. Many dairy products are fortified with D or it can be taken as a supplement.
- 5.** Drinking alcohol to excess, smoking and not exercising significantly increases a woman's risk for osteoporosis. Weight-bearing exercises actually increase bone mass so lifting weights should be part of a woman's regular routine. Alcohol inhibits the absorption of calcium which leads to a decrease in bone mass. The effects of tobacco are still being studied, but it does appear to inhibit bone growth.
- 6.** A family history of osteoporosis, fractures and breaks also increase a woman's risk. It is important to discuss this with mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters to see what the risk level is in the family.
- 7.** Mental health is also a major risk factor for women. They are twice as likely to become depressed than men and this can actually lead to bone loss. Women who are depressed don't hit the gym and tend to not eat at all or eat unhealthy foods. This lifestyle increases the risk. Also, many anti-depressant medications, are known to inhibit bone growth.

There is no reason a woman has to accept osteoporosis. By taking steps early in life, she can reduce her risk of developing this debilitating disease and build an overall healthier body. Be proactive and discuss osteoporosis early on with Dr. Yessenow.