

## Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition which affects the bones. If you have osteoporosis it means that you have lost some bone material, which makes them more prone to breaking (fracture). Osteoporosis mainly affects older people, but can affect anyone. Some people have an increased risk of developing osteoporosis.

All men and women have some risk of developing osteoporosis as they become older, particularly over the age of 60. Women are more at risk than men. Women lose bone material more rapidly than men, especially after the menopause when the level of oestrogen falls. Oestrogen is a female hormone and helps to protect against bone loss. By the age of 70 some women have lost 30% of their bone material. Some diseases or conditions, certain medicines or having a family history of the osteoporosis also puts some people at a higher risk. In the UK, about half of women and about 1 in 5 men over the age of 50 will fracture a bone, many as a result of osteoporosis.

You can take measures to prevent or slow down bone loss.

### Exercise

Regular weight-bearing exercise throughout life is best, but it is never too late to start. This means exercise such as brisk walking, aerobics, dancing, running, etc. For older people, a regular walk is a good start. You should try to exercise for at least 30 minutes 4-5 times per week.

Research studies have shown that moderate levels of activity, including walking, decreases the risk of having a hip fracture in older women.

### Food and Diet

Calcium and vitamin D are important for bone health. The recommended daily intake for calcium in adults is 700 mg, but more may be required for people with osteoporosis. Everyone over 65 years should aim to take 400 International Units (IU) of vitamin D daily.

**Calcium** - You can get 700-1000mg of calcium most easily by drinking a pint of milk a day plus eating 60g (2oz) hard cheese such as Cheddar or Edam, one pot of yoghurt (125g) or 60 g of sardines. Bread, calcium-fortified soya milk, vegetables such as curly kale, okra, spinach, watercress, dried fruits such as apricots, figs, are also good sources of calcium. Butter, cream and soft cheeses do not contain much calcium.

**Vitamin D** - There are only a few foods that are a good source of vitamin D. About 115g (4oz) of cooked salmon or cooked mackerel provide 400 IU of vitamin D. The same amount of vitamin D can also be obtained from 170g (6oz) of tuna fish or 80 g (3oz) of sardines (both canned in oil). Vitamin D is also made by your body after exposure to the sun. (The ultraviolet rays in sunshine trigger your skin to make vitamin D.) For most people over 65 an adequate amount of vitamin D can only be achieved by taking vitamin D supplements.

If you are unsure whether you should have calcium or vitamin D supplements please ask one of our doctors or nurses.

### Smoking and drinking

Chemicals from tobacco in the bloodstream can affect the bones and make bone loss worse. If you smoke you should make every effort to stop. Also, cut down on alcohol if you drink heavily.

### Avoid a fall in the home - top ten tips from Dr Johnson:

- Get up slowly from a chair and wait a few seconds before walking off - dizziness causes unsteadiness and falls
- Avoid waxed floors, slippery rugs on floors, make sure carpets aren't loose and use rubber mats on the bathroom floor
- Keep electrical cables fixed against walls and not across floors
- Avoid dim lighting; ensure rooms are well lit
- Avoid trip hazards by tidying living areas
- Place things at easy to reach heights
- Make sure banister rails are fastened securely; consider installing rails beside stairs for balance and support
- Replace worn tread on stairs and attach non-slip adhesive to steps
- Take your time, don't try to rush; use your walking stick/frame around the house
- Attend GP appointments for regular reviews of medication and blood pressure; both high and low blood pressure and certain medications put you at greater risk of falling.