

Osteoporosis in Men – More Common Than You Think

It would be impossible to recall the number of times your parents told you to “stand up straight” and that “good posture is important.” Their well-meaning advice was legitimate. Research consistently shows that is never too early – or too late – to strengthen your spine.

Osteoporosis, a degenerative condition which occurs when bones become “porous” due to loss of density and mass, is most commonly associated with women. Bone loss occurs more slowly in men because their larger bone mass provides greater “reserves,” but it still presents a significant health risk. In fact, men and women lose bone mass at the same rate in their mid-sixties and early seventies.

According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, osteoporosis is responsible for fractures in 1 in 4 men over the age of 50. An estimated 80,000 men break a hip each year, and men are more likely to die from complications after a fracture than women. In fact, the likelihood of a man breaking a bone due to osteoporosis is greater than his chance of developing prostate cancer.

Bones are actually living tissue comprised of collagen, mineral complexes, and live cells that partner to provide a flexible framework. As with other tissue that repeatedly regenerates, bones work continually to strengthen weakened sections and repair damage as it occurs. Factors which contribute to the loss of bone mass and bone density include certain medications which may decrease calcium absorption, lifestyle choices such as alcohol abuse or smoking, menopause, and the natural aging process.

The statistics on osteoporosis are staggering. The National Osteoporosis Foundation reports that 52 percent of Americans are affected by osteoporosis or low bone mass. This figure far exceeds the entire populations of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, and Washington, D.C. While only 2 million men have a current diagnosis of osteoporosis, at least 12 million are at risk for developing this degenerative disease.

Due to the dramatic decrease in bone mass in women following menopause, doctors often recommend routine bone density testing. Although the same testing is available for men, osteoporosis is rarely suspected or diagnosed in men until a severe injury or fracture occurs.

Broken bones are not the only consequence of osteoporosis. Compression or fractures of spinal vertebrae in both genders can cause a spinal curvature, called kyphosis, which can lead to loss of height, severe pain, or cause the stomach to protrude. Spinal curvature, hunched shoulders, or uncomfortable casting of broken bones can impede the ability to socialize, shop, or engage in physical activity.

Regardless of age, gender, family history of osteoporosis, and other elements of risk, certain factors are within your control.

- ✓ Enjoy a diet rich in fresh fruits, vegetables, calcium, and vitamin D
- ✓ Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine, sodium, and protein
- ✓ Limit consumption of alcoholic beverages, and quit smoking
- ✓ Maintain a healthy lifestyle that includes weight-bearing activities
- ✓ Engage in spine-strengthening exercises to promote proper posture

Osteoporosis is responsible for an estimated two million broken bones each year, but hip fracture, stooped shoulders, and spinal curvature are not an inevitable part of aging. If you notice changes in posture, experience unaccountable back pain, or feel you've lost inches in height, please speak with your doctor about bone density testing and to determine your risks for osteoporosis.