Osteoporosis and Digestive Problems

by BRENDA VANTA

How OP Can Lead to Digestive Distress, and Vice Versa

Osteoporosis can affect your health in so many ways, including your digestion. The digestive tract can be influenced by the change in spine shape caused by OP. However, you should also be aware that some digestive tract problems can lead to OP over time.

How Osteoporosis Can Lead to Digestive Problems

Osteoporosis often impacts your spine, which is made up of vertebrae. The spine is made up of different regions, called the cervical (the top part), thoracic (the upper and middle portion), and the lumbar and sacral (the lower part).

OP is usually linked with fractures of the thoracic spine, causing changes in the posture known as kyphosis, height loss, and pain in the upper back.

When the spine is affected by kyphosis it will have an abnormal forward curvature that gives the appearance of a “humpback.” In this case the curvature of the spine measures 50 degrees or more (on an X-ray) where the normal spine would measure 20 to 45 degrees of curvature.

Kyphosis develops over time, as the vertebrae break and the spine loses its normal shape. The more bones that break, the bigger the curvature of the spine will be. In some cases, there is no pain associated with fractures, and people notice over time that their clothes don’t fit properly anymore, or they have become shorter.

In other cases, OP sufferers will experience sharp, intense pain as the tendons and ligaments around the vertebrae become stretched or the nerves get pinched.

In cases of severe kyphosis, one may notice digestive problems, because the abnormal curvature of the spine will cause a reduction of the space between internal organs. The stomach or abdomen may be pushed forward, causing eating and breathing problems.

What You Can Do

Know the early signs of kyphosis, which include:

- Head bending forward compared with the rest of the body
- Difference in shoulder blade height and position
- Tight hamstrings (back thigh) muscles

Protect your spine from movements that increase the risk of fractures – for example avoid bending forward from the waist, bending forward when you cough or sneeze, twisting and bending at the torso, carrying heavy bags or

items, or reaching for objects that are placed on high shelves.

Keep your spine in shape with exercise, but avoid toe touches or abdominal crunches when you work out.

See a physiotherapist and get an individualized plan to include spine strengthening exercises (that help your spine to stay straight and upright) and posture exercises (to improve flexibility of the spine.)

How Digestive Problems Can Cause Osteoporosis

Occasionally digestive problems can lead to osteoporosis, instead of the other way around. OP is diagnosed more often in people who also have gastro intestinal diseases, especially those associated with poor absorption or digestion (i.e. celiac disease, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and after stomach or intestine surgery).

This happens because the nutrients from foods are not properly absorbed, and therefore the bones will lack calcium and other minerals.

What You Can Do

If you suffer from a digestive disease, make sure you talk to your doctor. Getting the optimal treatment will help improve your digestion and reduce the risk of OP. You should also check your bone density regularly.