Emotional and Social Impacts with Osteoporosis

by NICOLE BARNICK

Osteoporosis & Quality of Life

Learning you've been diagnosed with osteoporosis, no matter what your age, can be a source of anxiety. Each person feels these physical and emotional effects differently. Osteoporosis can be a life-changing diagnosis in many ways. Let's take a look at the emotional effects of osteoporosis.

Consider these areas of your life and assess the impact osteoporosis may or may not have:

- Feelings of anxiety and/or depression.
- Diminished self-image.
- Avoiding leisure activities due to feeling you have limitations.
- Experiencing acute or chronic pain.
- Unable or challenged when performing activities of daily living (ADLs).
- Experiencing a loss of independence.
- Changing or strained relationships with family and friends.

Work with a physician who understands that treating osteoporosis is more than focusing on the disease itself. Given the other areas of life that this condition can affect, you may find value in having a provider who treats the whole person, not just the disease.

Emotional Toll of Osteoporosis

Do you find yourself anxious socializing in crowds or going out in busy public places like the theatre or mall? You might consider planning to avoid peak times and mapping out a route that enables you to sit down if feeling fatigued or any anxiety building.

Any symptoms of depression should not be ignored. These include feelings of hopelessness, uselessness, thoughts of suicide, and loss of appetite. If these symptoms have been present for 1-2 weeks contact your doctor or therapist immediately.

Notable outward changes in appearance occur with complications caused by osteoporosis. Change in posture may lead to feelings of self-consciousness. Take a friend shopping to look for styles of clothing that minimize any changes in posture you may have experienced.

Functional Concerns of Osteoporosis

If you're dealing with increasing pain, diminished strength, or multiple fractures it is still important to try to maintain mobility. Don't sit longer than 30 minutes if you can help it. You need the circulation from movement even if you are just standing for a few minutes to decrease stiff joints.

If your activities of daily living are suffering, it may help to reduce the time you spend performing them. Maintaining your independence can be a challenge, but don’t hesitate to enlist the support of others. Don’t stop those sports and/or activities you enjoy; instead, look for ways to protect your bones from injury. This may mean finding new sports or hobbies that are less likely to result in injury. Staying active will provide improved muscle strength, balance, overall health, and can also have a positive influence on mental health.

Chronic pain is not uncommon, especially after years of osteoporosis or suffering multiple bone fractures. Make sure you have a qualified physical therapist as a part of your care team to help you minimize or even relieve the pain you’re experiencing.

Social Support

As with many health conditions establishing a healthy support network is a key variable to helping you manage the impact of the disease both physically and mentally. As you encounter challenges that may come from developing limitations, the support of your friends, family, and support groups will be valuable.

Asking for help may not be easy, though you’ll be glad you did when others willingly help out, which may lead to reducing your risk of fracture, increased pain, etc. Create a balance with what you can offer in return. That way no one feels they are being taken advantage of in the relationship.

To ensure you're understanding the emotional effects of osteoporosis, review the initial list I mentioned often. Be open and honest with yourself to evaluate how you are handling these variables in your life and determine if they are related to your osteoporosis. It’s important to try to manage all facets that osteoporosis can impact for the best quality of life. Remember that considering simple adaptations and staying open to change can lead to continuing to do the things you enjoy in life.