Osteoporosis in Men

by ANGELA FINLAY

Osteoporosis: Not Just a Women's Disease

Although it’s often connected to post-menopausal women, men are not exempt from the bone damage and weakness of osteoporosis. Women do develop osteoporosis more often than men, as men tend to have larger skeletons, and they do not go through the hormonal changes that cause bone loss in women. However, bone density can suffer due to genetics, lifestyle, nutrition and fitness routine regardless of your gender.

Statistics show that more men are affected by osteoporosis than you may imagine: up to 25% of men over the age of 50 will break a bone due to osteoporosis – more than will be diagnosed with prostate cancer. Additionally, breaks from osteoporosis can be more dangerous for men than they are for women, as men are more likely to die within a year of breaking a hip than female patients.

However, there are specific steps men can take to better bone health with certain lifestyle changes and some help from their doctor.

Risk Factors

Many of the risk factors for osteoporosis are the same for women and men, but there a few that apply uniquely to men. Some of the more common contributors to osteoporosis in men include:

- Smoking
- Excessive drinking
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Calcium and vitamin D deficiency
- Low testosterone levels
- Low estrogen levels
- Drugs for prostate cancer
- Corticosteroids (often used to treat autoimmune disorders)

In many cases, the root of the problem can be traced to hormonal changes. Male bodies naturally convert some testosterone to estrogen, and estrogen plays an important role in building bone mass in both women and men. When there’s a testosterone deficiency, or a lack of the naturally-occurring enzyme that creates estrogen, men can suffer from bone loss.

A number of chronic health conditions also increase a man's likelihood of developing osteoporosis, including:

- COPD
- Asthma
- Systemic mastocytosis
- Cystic fibrosis

- Osteogenesis imperfecta
- Homocystinuria
- Ankylosing spondylitis

- Gastrointestinal disease
- Hyperparthyroidism
- Hypogonadism
- Hypercalciuria
- Thyrotoxicosis
- Neoplastic disease
- Rheumatoid arthritis

Occasionally the medications used to treat these illnesses increase the risk of osteoporosis, and other times it is the condition itself that increases the risk.

Next page: preventing osteoporosis.

Preventative Measures for Osteoporosis

There's a good deal you can do to manage osteoporosis, and even build up bone density to prevent against future damage. It may come as a surprise that exercise is one of the best treatments and preventative measures, especially high impact activities where your feet hit the ground with some force, like:

- Jogging
- Jumping
- Racquet sports
- Climbing stairs
- Plyometric movements

Experts recommend complementing your high-impact aerobic routine with some weightlifting or resistance training for all-round strength and energy.

Diet is the other major element in an osteoporosis treatment plan. Calcium-rich foods should be your first line of attack, followed by supplements, along with a good dose of vitamin D to help your body absorb the bone-building mineral. Talk to your doctor about the individual levels of each vitamin that you need and how you can alter your diet without restricting balance and variety.

Other prudent measures for avoiding osteoporosis include:

- Quitting smoking and limiting alcohol intake – both alcohol and cigarettes limit the body's ability to absorb calcium.
- Drinking plenty of water
- Taking a daily calcium supplement adequate for your age.
- Taking a vitamin D supplement. Men over the age of 70 should take 800 IU per day, while men under 70 should take 600 IU. The amount of vitamin D in a quart of fortified milk is 400 IU. Most milk is fortified with vitamin D.
- If you are on any medications that may cause bone loss, you will want to discuss the risks with your doctor and if there are any alternatives.

Take Control of Your Bone Health

The medical community seems to diminish the osteoporosis threat for men. Not only are they less likely to be assessed for osteoporosis, but despite the damage and danger osteoporosis can pose, men are also less likely to receive prompt and proper treatment after breaking a bone. Therefore, it's particularly important for men to pay

close attention to risk factors, bone problems and regular maintenance once they reach middle age.

A bone mineral density (or bone densitometry) is a test that should be performed in all men over the age of 65, whether or not they have any symptoms. You should also ask for some simple screening to rule out underlying medical issues that could affect your bone health. Staying proactive is your best bet to catch issues before they become dangerous threats to your health and longevity.