

Talking with Your Doctor About Osteoporosis

Women who are going through or have been through menopause are at increased risk of developing osteoporosis. Estrogen plays a role in bone health, and a lack of estrogen can make bones weaker as you age.

As well as low levels of estrogen, other risk factors can increase your chances of developing osteoporosis. Some risk factors include low calcium or vitamin D levels, low body weight, obesity and a history of bone fractures.

If any of these risk factors apply to you, it might be a good idea to see your doctor for advice on managing the risks to bone health as you age.

This resource is designed to help you prepare for your visit to the doctor.

Before you go

- **Make a note of your concerns.** Your doctor will be able to reassure you and make suggestions about how to prevent or treat osteoporosis.
- **Check your family history.** You have an increased chance of bone fracture if you have a family history of osteoporosis or if one of your parents has ever broken a hip. Find out this information beforehand, along with any other family history that you think might be significant.
- **Prepare a list of any medications you take.** Your doctor will have access to this information, but it helps if you make a note of all your medications to take to your appointment.
- **Are you menopausal or post-menopausal?** HRT treatments for menopause can also help protect against osteoporosis. Your doctor will advise whether this is a suitable option for you.

During your appointment

- **You might have to answer questions about your diet, exercise levels, and whether you drink alcohol or smoke.** That's because these factors can all influence your risk of developing osteoporosis.
- **You and your doctor will make decisions together.** Your doctor will use clinical judgement and experience to recommend the best course of action, but you will also be involved in any decisions about your care.
- **Ask questions.** You might have concerns about the side effects of osteoporosis medications or differences in administration requirements. Your doctor will explain any differences between treatments and possible side effects of each one, with clear instructions on how to take your osteoporosis medication. You might also receive information leaflets to take home with you.
- **Your doctor might want to examine you,** so wear clothing that you can take off and put back on easily.
- **Your doctor will decide whether you need more tests.** You might need a bone density scan or blood tests to give a better idea of your bone health.

What happens next?

- You might need to have a **bone density scan**, also called a DEXA scan. A DEXA is a painless x-ray scan that passes over your body checking for weak bones. It's the best way to check for signs of osteoporosis.
- Think about making **changes to your diet** to ensure you are taking in enough **calcium** and **vitamin D**. Your doctor may have advised you to take supplements.
- Think about introducing **regular exercise** into your routine. Load-bearing exercises can help to strengthen bones.
- Read through any **information leaflets** from your doctor.
- It is vitally important that you **follow your doctor's instructions closely** to increase the effectiveness of your medication. Ask your doctor to explain which type of medication you are prescribed and how to take them correctly.

Conversation starters

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My Mum has osteoporosis and has recently broken her hip.
Could I be at risk too?

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I saw a poster in your waiting room that says post-menopausal women are at risk of developing osteoporosis. I haven't had a period for a while, and I think I've gone through menopause. Do I need to do anything?

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A friend of mine tripped and fell in her house and broke her hip. Her doctor told her she has osteoporosis. I'm the same age as her, and I'm worried that I could have it too without knowing.

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I've been taking HRT since I went through menopause. Am I still at risk of getting osteoporosis?

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A friend of mine recently got tested and found out she is at risk of a bone fracture; are there any tests that you think I should have to evaluate my risk?