



Preparing for Your Visit
With Your Doctor and Healthcare Team

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You can take steps at every age to prevent osteoporosis and keep your bones strong. Osteoporosis is a condition in which the bones lose density, causing them to become weak.

When you have osteoporosis, you can break a bone from a minor fall, and in some cases, from a simple action such as a sneeze or bumping into furniture. You can also have bone density that is low, but not low enough to be considered osteoporosis. This is called osteopenia.

If your healthcare provider hasn't talked to you about your bone health, it's time for you to bring it up. Together, the two of you can develop a plan for protecting your bones.

A healthcare provider is a family doctor, gynecologist or other doctor. So are nurse practitioners and physician assistants. They all make up your healthcare team, together with other types of health professionals.

This booklet offers information to help you prepare for your visit with your healthcare team. It contains the following four sections:

Part I: Preparing for Your Appointment

Part II: Finding a Specialist and Getting a Second Opinion

Part III: Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

Part IV: What to Expect if You Are Diagnosed With Low Bone Density or Osteoporosis

Part I: Preparing for Your Appointment

For some people, visiting a doctor or healthcare provider can be stressful. You may feel nervous or rushed and forget to ask the right questions. The following tips can help you make the most of your visit to help keep you and your bones healthy.

Write your questions down and bring them to your appointment. Before your appointment, write down any questions or concerns you would like to discuss with your healthcare provider. Put the most important items at the top of your list. Also remember to take paper and a pen or pencil with you to your appointment so you can take notes. Pages 6-8 of this booklet suggest several questions you might want to ask.

Let your healthcare provider know about any medications you take. Bring a list of all medications, including over-the-counter medications, herbal remedies and supplements you take to your appointments. You may also want to bring the bottles with you, so he or she can see the information listed on the product labels.

Your healthcare provider needs to know if any of your medications could cause bone loss or increase your risk of falling. He or she also needs to be aware of any possible interactions between your current medications, herbal remedies or supplements and any new medications you may start to take.

Be prepared to answer questions about your lifestyle. Your healthcare provider may ask you about the foods you eat, how much you exercise and whether you smoke or drink alcohol. Be as truthful as possible. Giving honest and accurate information can help you and your healthcare provider make important decisions about your bone health.

Bring a friend or family member with you. It is often helpful to have someone with you to take notes and ask questions. Your friend or family member can also help you remember what you and your healthcare provider discussed.

Ask additional questions. Often times, the discussion between you and your healthcare provider will leave you with more questions to ask. For example, you may not understand everything your healthcare provider tells you. Don't be afraid to ask him or her to explain anything you don't understand.

Other things to think about before your visit. If you use a wheelchair, don't see well or have other special needs, let the office know when you schedule your appointment. If you have glasses or hearing aids, take them with you. If you don't speak English, ask your healthcare provider's office if they can help you find an interpreter.

Part II: Finding a Specialist and Getting a Second Opinion

Finding a Specialist

If you are at risk for osteoporosis or already have it, it's important that you have a healthcare provider who knows about the disease. While there is no one type of medical specialty dedicated to osteoporosis, many healthcare providers are qualified to diagnose and treat it.

Some doctors who may have experience in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis include:

- Endocrinologists
- Family physicians or general practitioners
- Geriatricians
- Gynecologists
- Internists
- Orthopedists
- Psychiatrists
- Rheumatologists



Some other health professionals who may be able to help people with low bone density or osteoporosis include:

- Nurses and nurse practitioners
- Physical therapists and occupational therapists
- Physician assistants
- Registered dietitians

If you already have a doctor, ask him or her about osteoporosis. Your own healthcare provider, who already knows your overall health, may be able to treat you. If you need to see a specialist, your healthcare provider may be able to suggest one.

If you don't have a healthcare provider or your healthcare provider can't help you, call your nearest university hospital or community hospital and ask for physician referral services or the department that cares for osteoporosis patients. This department varies from hospital to hospital. For example, in some facilities, the department of endocrinology or metabolic bone disease treats osteoporosis patients, and in others it may be the department of rheumatology, orthopedics or gynecology.

Some hospitals also have a separate osteoporosis program or women's health clinic that treats osteoporosis patients. Not all hospitals, however, have departments or programs that focus on osteoporosis.

When you contact a healthcare provider, ask if he or she treats patients with osteoporosis. Healthcare providers with a background or specialty in "metabolic bone diseases" should also be qualified to treat patients with osteoporosis.

To help you locate a healthcare provider that diagnoses or treats osteoporosis, the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) has developed a Professional Partner's Network® (PPN) directory. While NOF cannot endorse any of the healthcare providers or healthcare organizations in the PPN directory, this may be a good place to start.

To locate PPN healthcare providers in your state, visit NOF's website at www.nof.org or call (202) 223-2226 or 1 (800) 231-4222 and ask for Patient Education.



Getting a Second Opinion

A second opinion can help you make sure you're getting the best treatment possible. A different healthcare provider may suggest other tests or treatments to diagnose and treat your condition. Here are some suggestions to help you:

Ask your healthcare provider or another person you trust to recommend a healthcare provider for a second opinion. Do not worry about offending your current doctor or other healthcare provider. Your health comes first and your healthcare provider should respect your request. Your first healthcare provider may also need to give you a written referral (sometimes called a prescription) for the second opinion.

Have your medical records sent to the healthcare provider who is providing the second opinion. This may require written permission and a fee. Allow at least two weeks for your current healthcare provider to process your request. In some cases, your healthcare provider will give you a copy of your records to take with you to the second opinion.

Contact your health insurance company to make sure they will cover the second visit. Find out if there is any other information you need to know about your insurance.

Part III: Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

Am I at risk for osteoporosis? Certain people are more likely to develop osteoporosis than others. Factors that increase the likelihood of developing osteoporosis and broken bones (also called fractures) are called “risk factors.” You have no control over some of these risk factors such as your sex, age, race/ethnicity and family history.

There are other risk factors you can change such as diet, exercise, smoking and drinking too much alcohol. Many of the choices you make each day can affect your bones. By making healthier choices you can help reduce your risk of osteoporosis as well as the painful broken bones it can cause.

Am I getting enough calcium and vitamin D? Calcium is an essential nutrient because it provides the material for building new bone. If you don't get enough calcium from food, you should consider taking a calcium supplement. The amount of supplement you need depends on how much calcium you get each day from the foods you eat. It's also important not to get too much calcium, because that can be harmful too.

Your body also needs vitamin D to absorb calcium. Your skin makes vitamin D when it is exposed to the sun. Vitamin D is also available in a few foods. Many people, however, do not get enough vitamin D. Ask your healthcare provider whether you should take a vitamin D supplement.

NOF's Calcium and Vitamin D Recommendations

- Adults under age 50 need 1,000 mg of calcium and 400-800 IU of vitamin D daily.
- Adults age 50 and older need 1,200 mg of calcium and 800-1,000 IU of vitamin D daily.

What kind of exercise can help me build strong bones? Your bones get stronger and denser when you make them work. And “work” for bones means handling impact, the weight of your body or more resistance. Ask your healthcare provider which types of exercises are appropriate for you and how often you should do them. Ask if there are any activities you should avoid.

If you have low bone density or osteoporosis, ask your healthcare provider about seeing a physical therapist (PT) to develop an exercise program that is safe and appropriate for you. You may need to get a referral to see a PT. If you make an appointment, make sure the PT is knowledgeable about osteoporosis.

If you have osteoporosis, be careful to avoid activities that require:

- Slumped, head-forward posture
- Twisting of the spine to a point of strain
- Twisting the trunk and bending forward when doing activities such as coughing, sneezing, vacuuming or lifting
- Heavy lifting and movements that increase your chance of falling



Could any of the medications I take cause bone loss? Some medications can be harmful to your bones, especially if taken at high doses or for a long time. One of the riskiest types of medications for bones is steroid medications. Many people need to take these medications for conditions like arthritis or asthma.

It's important to talk with your healthcare provider about the risks and benefits of any prescription or over-the-counter medications you take and about how they may affect your bones. Do not stop any treatment or change the dose of your medications unless your healthcare provider says it's safe to do so. If you need to take a medication that causes bone loss, work with your healthcare provider to take the lowest possible dose to control your symptoms.

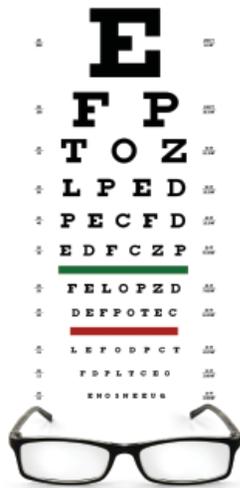
Do I have any conditions that could cause bone loss? There are many health problems that can harm your bones and increase your risk of osteoporosis. Ask your healthcare provider if you have any medical conditions that can cause bone loss. If you learn that you have a condition that could lead to osteoporosis, ask your healthcare provider what steps you can take to protect your bones.

Do I need a bone mineral density (BMD) test? Many tests are used to evaluate bones. The bone mineral density (BMD) test is the only one that can diagnose osteoporosis. Your BMD, along with other risk factors, can predict your chance of breaking a bone and can help your healthcare provider decide if you need treatment.

Experts recommend a specific type of BMD test of the hip and/or spine to diagnose osteoporosis. This test is called a central DXA which stands for dual energy x-ray absorptiometry. Ask your healthcare provider if you need a BMD test.

How can I prevent falls? Each year about one-third of all persons over the age of 65 will fall. One way you can prevent broken bones is by preventing falls. The following tips can help:

- Have your vision and hearing checked often.
- Wear supportive shoes with rubber soles and low heels. Don't walk in socks or slip-on slippers, especially on wood or tile floors.
- Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if any medications you take could cause you to feel dizzy or lose your balance.
- Keep your floors free of clutter. Remove loose wires, cords and throw rugs.
- Keep halls, stairs and entryways well lit.
- Use night-lights in bedroom and bathroom.
- Use grab bars and a nonskid rubber mat in the shower or bathtub.
- Use nonskid rubber mats in the kitchen near the sink and stove.
- Do balance training exercises.



Part IV: What to Expect if You Are Diagnosed With Low Bone Density or Osteoporosis

Steps for Diagnosing Osteoporosis

- **Medical history.** Your healthcare provider will ask questions to better understand your risk.
- **Physical exam.** Your healthcare provider may measure you to see if you have lost any height and examine your spine to see if it is curving forward. If you have low bone density or osteoporosis, you should have your height checked each year at the same healthcare provider's office.
- **Bone mineral density (BMD) test.** A BMD test is the only test that can diagnose osteoporosis before a broken bone occurs. If you have osteoporosis, you should repeat the test every one to two years to see if your bones are losing density or staying the same. If possible, you should have the same test done at the same place to allow your healthcare provider to better compare your test results.
- **Lab tests.** Your healthcare provider may order special lab tests of the blood or urine called bone turnover markers or biochemical markers. These tests can help to estimate how fast you're losing bone or making new bone. They can also help to see if your bone is responding to treatment with an osteoporosis medication.

You may also need a simple blood test to see if you're getting enough vitamin D. It measures 25-hydroxyvitamin D, which is also written as 25(OH)D.

Other Tests You May Need

- **Tests to find broken bones in the spine.** If you have a loss of height, posture changes or back pain, your healthcare provider may order an x-ray to look for broken bones in your spine. In some people, broken bones in the spine don't cause any pain.

Another way to find broken bones in the spine is with a vertebral fracture assessment (VFA) by a DXA machine (see p.8). This method uses less radiation than a standard x-ray. VFAs can show breaks in the spine and can also show the difference between broken bones and abnormally shaped bones. When you have a broken bone in the spine, you still need to have a BMD test if you haven't had one.

■ **Nuclear bone scans, CT Scans or MRIs.** These tests can show changes that may be caused by cancer, bone lesions, inflammation, other conditions or new broken bones.

Steps After a Diagnosis

■ **Check for secondary osteoporosis.** If you have been diagnosed with osteoporosis, your healthcare provider should check to see if you have another medical condition that is causing bone loss. This is also called secondary osteoporosis. If you have another condition that is causing bone loss, treating that condition will usually help your bone health. But, for many people, there is often no known cause for their bone loss or osteoporosis.

■ **Discuss treatment options.** For most people, treatment for osteoporosis includes a prescription medication. A number of medications have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to prevent and treat osteoporosis. If your healthcare provider recommends a specific osteoporosis medication, you may want to ask the following questions:

- Why do you think this medication is right for me?
- Is there a generic version available?
- How long will I need to take this medication?
- What are other options?
- What if my insurance does not cover this medication?



Other questions you may want to ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist include:

- What side effects are common with this medication?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How should I take this medication?
- Are there any foods, medications or activities I should avoid while taking this medication?

If you take an osteoporosis medication, you still need to get enough calcium and vitamin D and to exercise for your medication to work. If you have questions about your medications be sure to speak with your healthcare provider or pharmacist. If you decide that a treatment is not right for you, **do not** just stop taking the medication. First, discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider.

When prescriptions are not filled, or if they are forgotten, taken incorrectly or stopped early, a person's health condition may not improve. It may even get worse. This can lead to extra tests, prescriptions, costs and broken bones that could have been prevented by taking the medication correctly.

Finding Support: Building Strength Together®

To help you connect with others who have osteoporosis, the National Osteoporosis Foundation has a program called Building Strength Together®. It provides an opportunity for people to share their concerns, find support and learn more about the disease. You can participate by joining:

- Support groups
- Online osteoporosis community



Researching Information

The following websites may be helpful to you:

- For information on clinical trials: www.centerwatch.com
www.clinicaltrials.gov
www.ciscrp.org
- For research information from studies: www.pubmed.gov
www.clinicalstudyresults.org
- To track new medications in development: www.phrma.org
- For drug and supplement information: www.fda.org
www.usp.org
www.pdrhealth.com
www.ods.od.nih.gov
www.drugdigest.org
www.medlineplus.gov
- For information on laboratory tests: www.labtestsonline.org
- For information on complementary and alternative medicine: <http://nccam.nih.gov>

NOTE: NOF cannot assume responsibility for the quality or trustworthiness of the information found on these websites. The content is not necessarily recommended or reviewed by NOF.

For more information, please visit www.nof.org.



Established in 1984, the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) is the nation's leading voluntary health organization solely dedicated to osteoporosis and bone health.

National Osteoporosis Foundation's Vision

To make bone health a reality and a lifelong priority for all individuals.

National Osteoporosis Foundation's Mission

To prevent osteoporosis and related fractures, to promote lifelong bone health, to help improve the lives of those affected by osteoporosis and to find a cure through programs of awareness, advocacy, public and health professional education and research.

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