Strong Bones for a Lifetime

Today, more than 44 million Americans have or are at risk for osteoporosis, a disease that causes bones to become fragile and break.

Prevention
Building strong bones, especially before the age of 30, can be the best defense against developing osteoporosis. A healthy lifestyle is important to keep bones strong.

Four important steps to prevent osteoporosis: (1) a balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D; (2) weight-bearing and resistance exercises; (3) a healthy lifestyle with no smoking or excessive alcohol use; and (4) bone density testing and medications when appropriate.

Evaluation
To determine if you have osteoporosis or if you are at risk for osteoporosis, your health care provider may recommend that you have your bone mass or bone density measured. Bone density tests (BMD tests) can detect osteoporosis before a fracture occurs; predict your chances of a future fracture; and determine your rate of bone loss. These simple, painless tests measure bone density in the hip and spine (central) or finger, wrist, knee, shin and heel (peripheral). Many insurance companies, including Medicare, cover the cost of bone density tests, if your health care provider determines you are at risk.

Treatment
A variety of medications are available to maintain bone health, including: bisphosphonates, calcitonin, estrogens, raloxifene and parathyroid hormone. Talk with your health care provider to find out if one of these options is right for you.

Are You At Risk?
Everyone is at risk for osteoporosis and our risk increases with age. Certain factors will increase a person’s risk. The following self-assessment will help you determine your risk for developing osteoporosis. Look for the ‘prevent osteoporosis’ logo on some questions - you may be able to lower your risk by making some changes. Please circle your answers.

1. Are you white or Asian? Yes No
   People who are white (Caucasian) or Asian (such as Chinese, Korean or Japanese) are at greater risk of osteoporosis, but people of all ethnic backgrounds are at risk.

2. Do you have a family history of osteoporosis, or has someone in your family had a hip or spine fracture? Yes No
   If someone in your family has or had osteoporosis, you are at greater risk of developing the disease. Remember, even if you have no family history of osteoporosis, you may still be at risk. Check with your health care provider to see if you should have further testing.

3. Do you have a small, thin frame or have you weighed less than 127 lbs. as an adult? Yes No
   Small bones, a thin frame or weighing less than 127 pounds are risk factors for both women and men. People who are heavier or who have a larger frame can still get osteoporosis.

4. Are you 65 or older? Yes No
   Bone loss occurs over time. The risk of osteoporosis increases for both men and women, especially over the age of 65.

5. Is your total daily intake of calcium (from food and from supplements) less than 1,000 mg (8 oz milk = 300 mg)? Yes No
   *You can lower your risk of osteoporosis by increasing your total daily intake of calcium. Calcium and vitamin D are important to bone health. Improve your bone health by eating calcium-rich foods like low-fat milk, cheese and broccoli or foods fortified with calcium, like orange juice, cereals and breakfast bars. You need at least enough calcium to equal 3 to 4 eight-ounce glasses of milk each day. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium. Vitamin D sources include exposure to sunlight, vitamin D-fortified dairy products, egg yolks, saltwater fish and liver. Talk with a registered dietician to learn about other foods that are high in calcium and bone building nutrients. Supplements can also play a role in bone health. Ask your pharmacist to describe your supplement options.

6. Do you exercise less than 30 minutes a day 3 times a week? Only weight-bearing exercises (walking, dancing or jogging) or resistance exercises (weights or resistance bands) count for building bone. Yes No
   *You can lower your risk of osteoporosis by doing weight-bearing and resistance exercises. Physical activity throughout life helps develop and maintain bone mass. Weight-bearing exercise (walking, dancing) is recommended at all ages. Resistance exercise (light weight lifting) is recommended after age 14. Persons age 35 and older should consult with their health care provider before beginning an exercise program.

7. Do you now or have you ever smoked cigarettes? Yes No
   *You can lower your risk of osteoporosis by quitting smoking. Smoking appears to lower estrogen levels, which increases the risk of osteoporosis. Smoking also appears to be linked with earlier menopause when the rate of bone loss dramatically increases.

8. Do you now or have you ever consumed an average of two or more alcoholic beverages per day? Yes No
   *You can lower your risk of osteoporosis by lowering your alcohol consumption. Drinking more than two alcoholic beverages per day can increase your risk of bone loss and fractures. This daily amount of alcohol may lead to poor nutrition (less calcium and other important nutrients) and to a greater risk of falling.

To complete assessment, turn page...
9. Do you now or have you ever taken thyroid medications, or cortisone-like drugs (for asthma, arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease), or antiepileptic medications (used for migraines) for 3 months in a row or longer?
   - Yes
   - No

   *You can lower your risk of osteoporosis by knowing how other medications affect bone health – talk to your health care provider. Long-term use (more than 3 months) of thyroid medications, cortisone-like drugs, antiepileptic medications or drugs to lower testosterone or estrogen levels can increase your risk of bone loss. Other drugs and many diseases also lead to increased risk. Ask your pharmacist or health care provider about your medications and ask your health care provider to thoroughly evaluate your risk.

10. Have you broken bones during adulthood?
    - Yes
    - No

    Often, the first symptom of osteoporosis is a fracture or broken bone. With osteoporosis, even a simple activity such as picking up a grocery bag can cause a fracture. If you’ve had one fracture, you may be at higher risk for another fracture. Check with your health care provider to evaluate your risk.

11. Are you female?
    - Yes
    - No

    Women are more at risk for developing osteoporosis due to lower peak bone mass and the loss of bone at menopause. Men can and do get osteoporosis. Everyone can be at risk.

**FOR WOMEN ONLY:**

12. Have you had an abnormal absence of menstruation (missed periods for 12 months or more – not including pregnancy)?
    - Yes
    - No

    Low estrogen levels can change the pattern of menstrual periods. These low levels may be due to eating disorders, excessive exercise or other hormonal problems. Estrogen loss during adolescence can have a significant effect on bone health. Failure to achieve maximum bone strength before age 30 can increase the risk of osteoporosis later in life.

13. Have you had early or surgical menopause (ovaries removed) or had your estrogen production lowered with medication (before age 45)?
    - Yes
    - No

    All of these situations increase the number of years that women have lower estrogen levels. This lowered estrogen level will increase the risk of osteoporosis.

14. Are you no longer menstruating and are not taking bone protective medications?
    - Yes
    - No

    *You can lower your risk of osteoporosis – check with your health care provider to discuss bone protective medications.

**FOR MEN ONLY:**

15. Have you been treated for prostate cancer or ever had low blood testosterone levels?
    - Yes
    - No

    Hormones are important in bone health for both men and women. Low testosterone levels (determined by blood test) can increase the risk of osteoporosis. Treatment for prostate cancer involves depressing testosterone levels, so such treatment is also a risk factor.

The more times you answered “yes”, the greater your risk for developing osteoporosis. If you answered “yes” to 3 or more questions:
1. Talk to your doctor about your personal risk for the disease.
2. Consider having a bone density test.
3. Modify the risk factors that you can change.
4. Contact the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services for additional information.

Remember: Osteoporosis is preventable and treatable!