



Being an active partner in your care

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KEEPING YOUR BONES STRONG AND HEALTHY

Strong and healthy bones are the 'backbone' of a healthy body at all stages of life. As you get older, maintaining strong and healthy bones will help reduce your risk of breaking a bone (this is called a fracture).

Osteoporosis is a condition where your bones become less dense and lose strength, making them break more easily. Symptoms of poor bone health or osteoporosis rarely show until a break occurs. These fractures can be life changing. If you have osteoporosis, even a minor bump or fall can result in a serious fracture. Osteoporotic fractures most commonly occur in the hip, spine

EVERY 3 MINUTES
an Australian breaks a bone due to osteoporosis



or wrist, but any other bone can break if your bone strength is low.

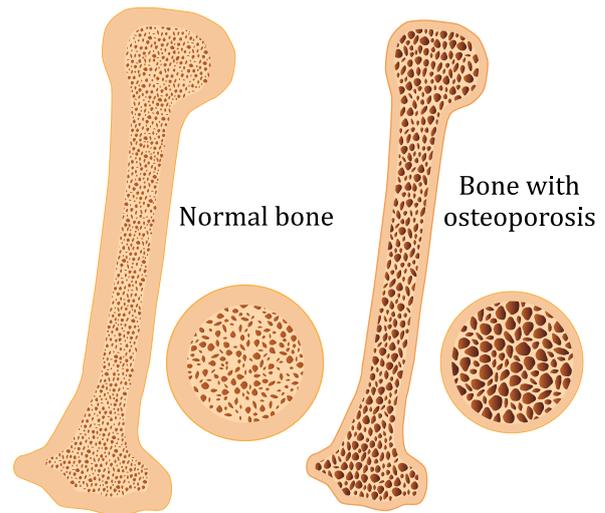
This brochure gives you the facts about osteoporosis, when to talk to your GP, and what you can do to help keep your bones strong and healthy.

Ask your GP

- Am I at risk of osteoporosis?
- Do I need a bone mineral density scan?
- How can I help keep my bones healthy?
- What should I do if I have osteoporosis?

? What does osteoporosis look like on the inside?

The honeycomb-like structures inside normal bones are small and densely packed. With osteoporosis, there is less bone and more empty spaces (see diagram). This means the bone becomes weaker and will break more easily. For further information about osteoporosis see the 'What you need to know about osteoporosis – consumer guide' at: www.osteoporosis.org.au/resources



? When should I talk to my GP about osteoporosis?

✓ Talk to your GP about osteoporosis, particularly if you are aged over 70

Both men and women are at risk of osteoporosis. Many things increase the risk of osteoporosis such as getting older and lifestyle factors. Therefore it is a good idea for everyone aged over 70 years to have an osteoporosis assessment.

✓ Talk to your GP about osteoporosis if you are taking a corticosteroid medicine

Some long-term health conditions and medicines can also affect bone strength. In particular, long term use of corticosteroids (e.g. cortisone, prednisolone) used to treat conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, and eczema.

✓ Talk to your GP about osteoporosis if you have had any signs of a fracture

About half of people who have a fracture due to osteoporosis will have another fracture. Osteoporosis should be assessed in anyone aged 50 years and over who has broken a bone after a minor bump or fall from standing height. Spinal fractures can be silent so you might not know you have had one. Possible signs of a spinal fracture include:

- unexplained back pain that is sudden and severe
- loss of height of more than 3 cm
- becoming hunched over at the top or the middle part of your spine.

Bone mineral density scans are quick and painless. They measure how much bone there is at the hip and spine. Your GP will decide whether you need a scan. A Medicare rebate is available for most people at risk of osteoporosis.

? What else can I do to keep my bones strong and healthy?

Important lifestyle changes can help to improve your bone health. This includes getting enough calcium, vitamin D and exercise every day. If you have osteoporosis, the chance of having a fracture can be reduced by these lifestyle changes, along with osteoporosis medicines and looking at ways to keep steady on your feet and active.

✓ Keep active and exercise

Exercise helps keep your bones strong and healthy, and can reduce your risk of falls and fractures. Talk to your GP about exercises that are suitable for you. These might include weight-bearing exercises such as brisk walking or stair climbing, resistance exercises such as lifting weights and balance exercises such as Tai Chi or yoga. If you have osteoporosis,

high intensity exercises should be avoided. Your GP can refer you to an exercise physiologist or physiotherapist who can design an exercise program to meet your needs.

DVA Gold and White Card holders might be eligible for services provided by some health professionals and require a referral from their GP.

Medicines for osteoporosis

If you have osteoporosis, your GP might prescribe a medicine to strengthen your bones which will help prevent fractures. Osteoporosis medicines increase bone density.

It takes time to rebuild the strength of your bones so keep taking your medicine as directed without missing a dose. Your bones will start getting stronger, even though you won't see or feel visible changes.

Keep in contact with your GP. Talk to them or your pharmacist about any concerns you have with your osteoporosis medicines. If you have a 6 or 12 monthly injection, make sure you mark it on your calendar as a reminder.

 **MORE THAN 4 MILLION AUSTRALIANS**

aged over 50 have osteoporosis or poor bone health

ONE IN FOUR PEOPLE with osteoporosis are men



4 OUT OF 5 PEOPLE with osteoporosis don't know they have it



? What else can I do to keep my bones strong and healthy?

✓ Eat a healthy diet with the right amount of calcium

Adequate amounts of calcium in your diet helps keep your bones strong and can help to prevent osteoporosis. For most people, this means about three to five serves of dairy and other calcium rich foods each day. Examples include a glass of milk, a few slices of cheese, a tub of yoghurt or a serve of tinned salmon. It is best to get calcium from your food rather than from a supplement. Talk to your GP if you are concerned about your calcium intake.

Always talk to your GP before starting, stopping or changing any of your medicines. These include supplements and other non-prescription medicines you might buy from the supermarket or pharmacy.

✓ Get enough Vitamin D

Vitamin D improves calcium absorption. It is produced by your body when your skin is exposed to sunlight while outdoors (but not when sitting behind glass). In summer, just a few minutes of sunlight on most days is enough and two to three hours per week in winter, depending on where you live. Get some sunlight on your bare skin as part of your usual routine. For example have a mid-morning cup of coffee out in the garden with your arms, face, neck and feet exposed to the

sunshine. Always wear sun protection if you are out in the sun for more than a few minutes during summer or when the UV index is above three. Talk to your GP if you are concerned about how much vitamin D you are getting.



✓ Look at ways to keep steady on your feet

For people with osteoporosis even a minor fall can cause a significant bone to break, such as a hip or spine. To help prevent falls, consider having your medicines reviewed, your footwear and eyesight checked, removing tripping hazards from your home and having a plan of action if you fall over. For practical tips, see the veteran brochure *Unsteady on your feet? Talk to your GP* at: www.veteransmates.net.au/topic-50