
Risk Factors for Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a silent disease that causes bones to become thin and weak, and increases the risk for broken bones. It can happen to anyone; the disease has no age, gender or ethnic boundaries. Osteoporosis more commonly affects the elderly, postmenopausal women, and individuals of Caucasian or Asian descent. This does not mean that others are not at risk for osteoporosis. For example, men and people who are African-American get osteoporosis, too; they are just at a slightly lower risk than Caucasian or Asian postmenopausal women (You are postmenopausal if you have not had your monthly period for 12 months in a row).

It is important for you to identify your personal risks for osteoporosis and discuss them with your health care provider. Knowing your risk factors is the first step in taking an active role in the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis.

Listed below are some of the risk factors for osteoporosis. The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk for osteoporosis.

- I am a woman older than 65 or a man older than 70.
- I am White or Asian.
- I am a woman who has reached menopause.
- A close relative has osteoporosis or has broken a bone.
- I have broken a bone after 50.
- I have lost more than 1-1/2 inches of height or have stooped posture.
- I rarely exercise.
- I rarely get enough calcium.
- I smoke.
- I have more than two drinks of alcohol several times a week.
- I take steroid medications.
- I have rheumatoid arthritis.

Although risk factors may increase your likelihood of getting osteoporosis, having risk factors does not mean that you have or will get the disease. It is important to be aware that there are rare conditions and medications that may contribute to osteoporosis as well as others that have not yet been identified. Even if you do not have any of the above risk factors for osteoporosis you can still get osteoporosis.

Knowing your risk factors is the first step in taking an active role to prevent and treat osteoporosis.