



# Preventing Osteoporosis

*Half of all women over the age of 50 will fracture their hip, wrist, spine, or other bone due to osteoporosis.*

## What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a condition that causes your bones to weaken and to break or fracture easily. As many as 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men will suffer from a fracture in their lifetime. However, you can reduce your risk of bone loss and fractures by taking some simple steps now.

## How can you prevent osteoporosis?

- **Take calcium and vitamin D every day to prevent osteoporosis**

Most adults over the age of 50 need 1,200 mg of calcium and 1,000 to 2,000 IU of vitamin D (preferably vitamin D3) every day in order to keep bones strong and healthy. Since most diets do not provide enough calcium and vitamin D, it is best to take at least a 500 to 600 mg daily calcium supplement and a 1,000 IU daily vitamin D supplement.

Low-fat dairy foods (milk, cheese, and yogurt) are good

natural sources of calcium. Green vegetables, almonds, and tofu also have very small amounts of calcium. Foods fortified with vitamin D include milk, orange juice, and some breakfast cereals. Check the amounts on the label carefully when you buy calcium and vitamin D fortified foods or drinks and supplements. Your body also makes vitamin D when your skin is exposed to the sun. However, the amount of vitamin D your body can make is limited by several things such as sunscreen use, your skin-color, where you live, and the amount of time you spend outdoors.

- **Make activity and exercise a part of each day.**

Daily activity helps keep your bones strong and makes them less likely to break if you fall. Weight-bearing exercise (walking, jogging, dancing, or lifting weights) is the best way to build strong bones and muscles.

- **Stop smoking.**

Smoking reduces bone strength and is a major risk factor for heart disease and cancer. Ask your physician or other health care professional for help to quit.

- **Cut down on caffeine, salt/sodium, and alcohol.**

Caffeine, sodium, and alcohol can reduce bone strength. Protect your bones by using less caffeine and sodium in your diet. Research shows that people who drink too much alcohol have more bone loss and fractures. Limiting how much alcohol you drink will help protect your bones. Keep it to one drink a day for women; two drinks or fewer a day for men.

- **Get a bone mineral density (BMD) test if you are a woman over age 65 or a man over age 70.**

We all lose some bone mass as we age. Bones naturally become thinner (called osteopenia) as you grow older because existing bone is broken down faster than new bone is made. As this occurs, our bones lose calcium and other minerals. Bones become lighter, less dense, and more porous. This increases the chance that they might break or fracture. The BMD test estimates the strength of your bones by measuring the density of minerals in your bones. The results help determine how much bone mass you've lost.



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## What are the risk factors for osteoporosis?

It's important to know if you are at risk. Risk factors include:

- Having a fracture after age 50 due to “brittle” bones.
- Smoking.
- Weighing less than 127 pounds or having a body mass index (BMI) less than 21.
- Having a parent, sister, or brother who has had a hip fracture.
- Having a history of falls in the past 12 months.

## When should you get a bone mineral density test?

- A bone mineral density test is recommended for all women at age 65 and for all men starting at age 70.
- For women at high risk of osteoporosis, bone mineral density testing may be recommended before age 65.
- If you are uncertain, talk with your doctor or other health care professional about whether you need a test.

## *How can you prevent falls?*

As you age, simple steps can prevent fractures.

- Stay active to maintain balance, strength, and coordination.
- Wear low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.
- Use a cane if your walk is unsteady.
- Get your vision checked regularly and wear glasses or contacts if needed.
- Tell your doctor if you feel dizzy or lightheaded. This may be caused by medications you are taking.
- Keep your house well lit to avoid falling or bumping into things.
- Avoid throw rugs and use rugs with non-slip backing.
- Keep floors and hallways clear of boxes, papers, clothing, and electrical cords.
- Install handrails and non-slip mats in your bathtub or shower and beside your toilet.
- Make sure you can easily reach all items in your kitchen.
- Avoid standing on chairs, stepstools, or ladders.

## Additional resources

- Visit our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org).
- Read *Menopause . . . A Kaiser Permanente Guidebook for Women* .
- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department.
- Contact the National Osteoporosis Foundation: (202) 223-2226 or [www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)
- Being hit, hurt, or threatened can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to [ndvh.org](http://ndvh.org).



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.