Are you worried about osteoporosis?

National Osteoporosis Society

help your bones
www.nos.org.uk
What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis literally means 'porous bones'. Our bones are made up of a thick outer shell and a strong inner mesh which looks like a honeycomb made up of tiny struts of bone. Osteoporosis means some of these struts become thin or break making bones more fragile and prone to fracture. It often remains undetected until a bone is first broken, which commonly occurs in the wrists, hips and spinal bones.

What causes osteoporosis?

Two cells are constantly at work in our bones, building new bone and breaking down old bone. Up to our mid-20s the construction cells work harder, building strength into our skeleton. From our 40s onwards, the demolition cells overtake and our bones gradually lose their density as a natural part of ageing. For one in two women and one in five men over the age of 50 in the UK this bone loss will lead to a broken bone because of osteoporosis. Exactly why this happens is still not fully understood and is the subject of much research.
What can I do to help my bones?

**Tuck into bone friendly foods.**
Lots of vitamins and minerals, including calcium, are important to a strong skeleton. Enjoy lots of different foods, including milk and dairy products, bread and cereals, meat and fish and plenty of fruit and veg.

Please see the NOS Diet and Bone Health booklet for further information.

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**Ron Fellows**
Ron Fellows, a chartered Civil Engineer, was diagnosed with osteoporosis at the age of 59, after falling and breaking a bone in his spine. Ron has idiopathic osteoporosis, which means there is no known reason for why he has developed the disease. He is now being treated with etidronate and his bone loss has now been stabilised. Like many people with osteoporosis, Ron is worried about falling and is now more cautious in his daily life. He is keen to make other people aware that osteoporosis is not just a woman's disease; it can affect men too.
Who is at risk?

Our bone health is largely down to our genes. But there are other factors that can put people at greater risk and you can discuss these with your doctor.

- Women if they’ve had an early menopause or hysterectomy with the removal of both ovaries, before the age of 45
- Men with low levels of testosterone
- People who have broken a bone after only a minor fall
- People who use corticosteroid tablets (for conditions such as asthma or arthritis)
- People with a family history of osteoporosis
- People with medical conditions which affect the absorption of foods, like Crohn’s disease or coeliac disease
- People with medical conditions which leave them immobile for a long time
- People who drink heavily
- People who smoke
- Women who are underweight or have developed an eating disorder.

Read about your bones

Join the National Osteoporosis Society and get four copies of our magazine Osteoporosis News a year. Packed full of all the latest information on osteoporosis and bone health. For more up to date information visit www.nos.org.uk
What are the treatments?

If you have broken bones because of osteoporosis then you are more likely to break another. There are effective drug treatments that can lower this risk.

- A class of drugs called bisphosphonates (currently alendronate, cyclical etidronate and risedronate with ibandronate expected in 2005). Available in tablet form either daily or monthly.

- Calcium and vitamin D. Often prescribed to older people in nursing care to help prevent broken hips.

- Selective estrogen receptor modulator (raloxifene). Prescribed for spinal fractures if bisphosphonates are not suitable.

- Strontium ranelate. A new drug that both builds up new bone and slows down the breakdown of old bone. Taken daily, it is a powder that is mixed in water.

- Teriparatide. Another new drug that builds bone. This drug is only available from specialists to those with severe spinal fractures.

There are other treatments available, including calcitonin, calcitriol and another bisphosphonate called pamidronate. These are generally only prescribed by specialists after other treatments have been tried.

Hormone replacement therapy (oestrogen for women and testosterone for men) is no longer a first line treatment for osteoporosis in women but is useful to tackle menopausal symptoms with added bone protection back-up. For men testosterone therapy can help to strengthen their bones.

Please see the NOS Drug Treatments for Osteoporosis booklet for further information.
What can I do to help my bones?

Get physical!
Bones need to keep active so give them regular weight bearing exercise. If you have broken bones you may need to be careful of high impact exercise but it's important to stay active and find something you enjoy. The NOS produces two booklets which might help Exercise and Bone Health - exercises to help prevent osteoporosis and Exercise and Osteoporosis - exercises for people with osteoporosis.

Is osteoporosis painful?

Not in itself, but the broken bones – particularly those in the spine – can be. Your doctor or local pharmacist will give advice on how to manage pain. Simple over-the-counter painkillers, if taken properly, can make a big difference. Other drug-free ways to manage pain include physiotherapy and hydrotherapy (exercise in water) or using a TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) machine. Alternative therapies, like acupuncture, homeopathy, the Alexander Technique and aromatherapy, can also be of some benefit.

The NOS Living with Osteoporosis – coping after broken bones booklet offers useful advice.
How can the National Osteoporosis Society (NOS) help you?

The National Osteoporosis Society provides information and support to help you learn how to help prevent osteoporosis or to manage living with the disease, either for yourself or as a carer.

Join today and as a member of the National Osteoporosis Society enjoy:

- A free information pack when you first join complete with a comprehensive booklet telling you all about osteoporosis
- A quarterly magazine, Osteoporosis News, packed with information about the latest treatments and research, lifestyle issues and what the charity is doing on your behalf
- Discount on a wide range of inexpensive publications designed to give you the information you need to lead a full and healthy life
- Discounts on invitations to our regional osteoporosis roadshows, where you will be able to hear about the latest advances in the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis and get the chance to question the experts
- The opportunity to share experiences with other people through our UK network of support groups and our exclusive website members' chatroom
- The opportunity to have your voice heard through our members' forum.

WARNING SIGNS

If you have already broken a bone after a minor bump or fall you may already have osteoporosis. Other warning signs include height loss and curvature of the spine (kyphosis). If you have one of these warning signs you may want to discuss your risk of osteoporosis with your doctor. Alternatively call the NOS Helpline 0845 450 0230 and speak to one of our nurses.