

# Understanding Osteoporosis in Men



By the time a man is in his third decade of life, his bone mass has peaked; he usually has acquired more bone mass than women at this point as well. From this period on, skeletal bone is on the decline. However, men will not go through a quick loss of bone mass like women do after menopause.

Typically around their 60s or 70s, men and women will experience decreasing bone mass at the same pace. Both genders will also experience a decline in their ability to absorb calcium, a necessary nutrient for bone health.

Too much bone loss can lead to fragile bones, which can result in men and women becoming more susceptible to fractures. Fractures that typically occur in the hip, spine and wrist sometimes lead to long-lasting disability.

## PRIMARY & SECONDARY OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis can be considered either primary or secondary. In primary osteoporosis (also known as senile osteoporosis), bone loss is experienced as a result of aging. With secondary osteoporosis, which occurs in the majority of men, there is at least one secondary cause of the disease. In this instance, bone loss can occur due to medications, disease or lifestyle choices, including abuse of alcohol and smoking.

The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases lists the following causes of secondary osteoporosis in men:

- Glucocorticoid medications;
- Immunosuppressive drugs;
- Hypogonadism (low testosterone levels);
- Excessive alcohol consumption;
- Smoking;
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma;
- Cystic fibrosis;
- Gastrointestinal disease;
- Anticonvulsant medications;

- Hyperparathyroidism;
- Immobilization;
- Osteogenesis imperfecta.

## A CALL FOR MORE RESEARCH

There is undoubtedly a need for more information to be published about the causes, treatment and prevention of osteoporosis in men. As a result, researchers are beginning to pay attention to this long-ignored population.

The National Institutes of Health have reported that they are supporting research to study the relationship between the risk of fracture in men and bone mass, structure and biochemistry, among other factors.

Researchers hope that health care providers will improve their understanding of how to treat, manage and possibly prevent this disease in the male population based on the study results.

In general, the following steps can facilitate bone health and help prevent osteoporosis, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation:

- Make sure to get enough daily calcium (low calcium intake leads to low bone mass) and vitamin D (this nutrient helps the body absorb calcium).<sup>3</sup>
- Routinely perform weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening exercises.
- Do not smoke or drink an excessive amount of alcohol.
- Talk to a health care provider about your chance of developing osteoporosis and ask for a bone-density test.
- If prescribed, take an osteoporosis medication. ■

## References

1. National Osteoporosis Foundation. (2011). Fast Facts. Retrieved from the World Wide Web, [www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)
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3. National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. (2011). Calcium and Vitamin D: Important at Every Age. Retrieved from the World Wide Web, [www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov)

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**T**en million Americans are estimated to have osteoporosis. Twenty percent of those affected by the disease are men.<sup>1</sup> Distinguished by low bone mass and bone-tissue weakening, osteoporosis can cause frailty of the bones and increase a person's vulnerability to hip, spine and wrist fractures. Because the bones become so weak, a minor fall—or, in some cases, even a sneeze or bumping into furniture—can break them.

Millions of men in the United States are affected by osteoporosis, but a high percentage of American men think of the disease as one that only affects women. In addition, males who are at risk due to their lifestyle habits fail to realize that osteoporosis can considerably affect their mobility and autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

Often referred to as a "silent disease," osteoporosis advances without a single symptom until the person sustains a fracture. Though a staggering number of men develop the disease, the male's larger skeleton leads to later starting and slower progressing bone loss—which is why osteoporosis is less frequent in men than in women. Still, osteoporosis in men has been identified as a critical public health issue over the past several years, since data shows the number of men over age 70 will increase as life expectancy rises.