

Osteoporosis

What is it?

Osteoporosis (porous bone) is a loss of bone mass or density. It is a silent thief that starts when you are younger and manifests itself when you are older. It is a condition by which the pores of bone gradually become enlarged (holey bones), thus weakening the structure, until one day, a fracture occurs from some trivial incident, such as a good sneeze or hug or a minor fall. An x-ray confirms the fracture, but osteoporosis cannot be detected unless 30 to 35% of bone density is already lost. Osteoporotic bone differs in no way from normal bone, there is just less of it.

Males are usually affected at a later age simply because they have a greater bone density to start with. Normal loss of bone density for males occurs at a slower and steadier rate than for females. During the first five years of menopause in women, studies show that the rate of bone loss can be six times that of men. Around the age of 65 to 70, it slows down again to a rate more equal to that of men.

Did you know that:

- some degree of osteoporosis occurs in about two-thirds of women over 65 years of age, but only about one fifth of men.
- with the normal ageing process, bone mass decreases faster than it can replace itself, resulting in a gradual loss of bone density.

How do I get it?

If you fit into one or more of these categories, you are at higher risk of having osteoporosis.

- you are a post-menopausal female
- you are of North European or Asian descent
- you are small framed
- you are light boned
- you have a slim figure
- you lack calcium in your diet
- you lead an inactive (sedentary lifestyle)
- your family has a history of osteoporosis
- you smoke, drink or use drugs excessively
- your doctor has determined that you have hormone deficiency
- you have been diagnosed as having hyperparathyroidism
- your ovaries have been surgically removed
- you have never been pregnant

How does it affect me?

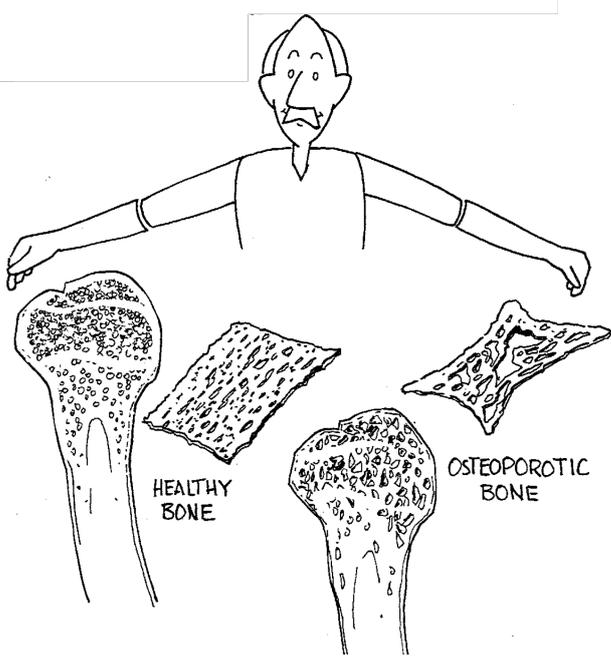
It may cause joint pain.

In osteoporosis, the vertebrae become brittle and in severe cases can collapse from the body's weight.

This may cause:

- a deformed spine or humped back (dowager's hump)
- chronic back pain
- loss of several inches in height

In severe cases, it may cause bones to fracture easily for no apparent reason, even when turning in bed.



Reference: Healthy happy ageing: a positive approach to active living
Yvonne Wagorn, Sonia Théberge, Dr William R Orban