Osteoporosis — The Silent Epidemic

Osteoporosis means porous bones. Bones that were once strong become weak and brittle. It is usually a painless disease until a bone fractures. About 25 million Americans, 80% of whom are women, have osteoporosis.

There are certain risk factors linked to the development of osteoporosis. Many people with osteoporosis have several of these risk factors, but others who develop osteoporosis have no identified risk factors. Some of these risk factors you cannot change and others you can.

**Risk factors you cannot change:**
- **Gender** Your chances of developing osteoporosis are greater if you are a woman.
- **Age** The older you are, the greater your risk for osteoporosis.
- **Body size** Small, thin women are at greater risk.
- **Ethnicity** Caucasian and Asian women are at highest risk. African-American and Latin women have a lower risk.
- **Family history** Susceptibility to fracture may be hereditary.

**Risk factors you can change:**
- **Hormones** Low levels of estrogen (menopause) and low testosterone in men; too much thyroid hormone can also cause bone loss.
- **Eating habits** Anorexia, lifetime low intake of calcium and vitamin D, excessive alcohol intake.
- **Medications** Use of certain medications, such as corticosteroids, some anticonvulsants, diuretics and other drugs.
- **Cigarette smoking**
- **Sedentary life style**

Evaluation for osteoporosis can involve having bone mass measured. There are several methods of evaluating bone mineral density (BMD). The standard is Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA), which is available at Valley Diagnostic Imaging Services, Medical Arts Center Outpatient location. This method utilizes a low dose of x-ray energy to evaluate the BMD of the spine and hip (and occasionally the wrist). These sites are the most common areas involved with osteoporotic fractures. Bone mineral tests can:
- detect low bone density before a fracture occurs;
- confirm a diagnosis of osteoporosis if a fracture has already occurred;
- predict chance of fracture in the future;
- determine the rate of bone loss and/or monitor the effects of treatment if the test is conducted at intervals of one year or more.

Treatment programs include proper nutrition and exercise. Medications that increase bone density and reduce fracture risk may be indicated. These medications include estrogen, bisphosphonate (Fosamax), and calcitonin.

**further reading:**

www.mayohealth.org
www.osteo.org