

OSTEOPOROSIS

A devastating disease of bone-loss which can be slowed by early detection

About 1.4 million Canadians have osteoporosis costing Canada's healthcare system over \$1.3 billion each year. Most of these costs are for hospital and long-term care. There is also a cost in the loss of quality of life of osteoporosis sufferers. Pain, reduced mobility, increased dependence on others impact greatly. In Canada, 70% of hip fractures are caused by osteoporosis and 20% of those will die while 50% will suffer some form of disability.

Osteoporosis is a disease of bone-loss. Bone cells are always being broken down and built up and what you eat and how you live your life can affect this process. When the breakdown far outstrips the building up, we get weaker bones more prone to fractures. The name osteoporosis means "porous bones". It gives you a good picture of the process. While we can't avoid bone loss but we can slow it down.



CAUSES OF OSTEOPOROSIS

After the age of thirty, more bone is lost than is replaced. We naturally lose some of our bone mass each year no matter what we do. The trick is to keep that loss to a minimum. That's where prevention comes in. With proper nutrition and exercise you will lose less bone when you are young and reduce the risk of getting osteoporosis when you are older.

There are many risk factors of osteoporosis. Just being an older female is a risk. More than 80% of persons with osteoporosis are white or Asian women who are post-menopausal. If you have a family history of the disease, you are at greater risk. Your body type also has a bearing. People that have a thin or slight build (less than 125lb) have thinner bones which are more fragile and can break more easily. If you have a sedentary lifestyle with little or no weight-bearing running or walking regularly, your bones will weaken. Smoking is associated with early menopause so is also a risk factor.

Also, there is an increased risk of osteoporosis if a person is taking corticosteroids drugs (e.g. prednisone) for a long duration (over 5 months). Those with an overactive thyroid condition (hyperthyroidism), chronic kidney failure and rheumatoid arthritis are also more prone to osteoporosis.

There are usually no warning signs that there is a problem until a fracture occurs. This is why osteoporosis is called "the silent thief". Bone loss occurs without your knowing it. It is greater after menopause and women can lose bone mass at a rate of about 3% per year.

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