

What is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis and associated fractures can rob you of your mobility and your independence. Osteoporosis is a disease that reduces the strength of your bones, causing them to become brittle and prone to fractures.

Osteoporosis Self Assessment

Approximately 50% of women over the age of 50 have osteoporosis and are at risk of an osteoporosis-related fracture. A woman's risk of hip fracture alone is equal to the combined risk of developing breast, uterine, and ovarian cancer and up to 20% of women who suffer hip fractures die within one year of the fracture.

Women who are postmenopausal are at risk of osteoporosis.

The presence of any one of these factors can add to your risk.

- **Age**
- **Caucasian or Asian descent**
- **Thin or small build**
- **Previous fracture**
- **Family history of osteoporosis**
- **Early menopause (before age 45)**
- **Smoking**
- **Inactive lifestyle**
- **Certain medications (including steroids and thyroid hormones)**
- **Alcohol abuse**
- **Inadequate calcium intake**

NOTE: You may have none of these risk factors and still be at risk of developing osteoporosis. Some authorities believe that the presence of any of these factors increases the risk of osteoporosis. However, even if you have none of these factors, you may still have osteoporosis. Only a bone density test can provide the information your doctor needs to help make a diagnosis.

Only a bone density test can tell you for sure

Today there are a variety of effective ways to manage osteoporosis. Early detection using a bone density test (one of which is known as a DXA) is the best way to protect yourself from the debilitating effects of this all-too-common condition.

How is a bone density test done?

The bone density test is a simple, painless, noninvasive procedure. You will be asked to lie perfectly still on a table while a movable arm passes over the area to be tested (for example, arms, spine, or hips).

Is a bone density test the same as a bone scan?

No. A "bone scan" is a procedure requiring an injection of radioactive material. A bone density test is faster and requires no special preparatory drinks, medications, or injections.

How long does the test take?

Small areas, like the spine, an arm, or a hip, can take two to five minutes each.

How much radiation will I be exposed to?

Very little. For example, a spine test delivers less than one-tenth the dosage of a chest X ray. As with any medical procedure, be sure to inform your physician if you are pregnant.

What should I wear?

Wear comfortable clothing, preferably without metal buttons, buckles, and zippers.

What will the bone density test reveal?

The test will measure your bone mineral density (BMD), or bone mass, and compare that number with a reference population whose age, sex, and racial background are similar to yours. This information will help your doctor determine if you need to take any specific steps to protect your bone health.

If you think you may be at risk for osteoporosis, ask your doctor if a bone density test will be of value to you.