Osteoporosis: The Brittle Truth

**What Is It?**
Osteoporosis is a bone disease in which bones become weak and susceptible to fracture. It is called a “silent disease” because you cannot feel or see your bones becoming thinner over time. Unfortunately, many people are diagnosed with osteoporosis only after a painful fracture has occurred.

**Who Is at Risk for Osteoporosis?**
All older adults are at risk. Certain individuals have factors that can increase their chance of developing the disease. Persons at higher risk include:

- Women especially those who are small-boned and thin
- Those with a family history of osteoporosis, including fractures in either the father or mother
- Caucasians and Asian-Americans
- Smokers
- Those who do not exercise regularly
- Women who have early menopause
- Those who do not get enough calcium and vitamin D

In addition to these risks, certain diseases and medications can lead to osteoporosis.

**How Can I Be Tested for Osteoporosis?**
For some patients, the diagnosis can be made based on review of their medical history and physical examination. In others, a Bone Density test can be helpful. Your physician can help determine what is required for you.
**How Can I Prevent Osteoporosis?**

To prevent osteoporosis, everyone should:

- Remain physically active and participate in weight-bearing (walking, dancing) and resistance (free weights) exercises
- Take 1200 mg/day of calcium
- Take 400 to 800 IU/day of vitamin D
- Avoid tobacco
- Limit alcohol intake
- Prevent falls

Prevention for some high-risk individuals includes:

- Hormone replacement
- Medications

**What Treatments Are Available?**

A number of effective medicines can actually rebuild bone in persons with osteoporosis. If you have osteoporosis, your doctor will talk to you about these drugs.

Disclaimer: This information is not intended as a substitute for professional care. Your physician should be consulted for personalized information.