



**National Institutes of Health
Osteoporosis and Related
Bone Diseases ~
National Resource Center**

2 AMS Circle
Bethesda, MD 20892-3676

Tel: 800-624-BONE or
202-223-0344

Fax: 202-293-2356

TTY: 202-466-4315

Internet: www.niams.nih.gov/bone

E-mail: [NIAMSBoneInfo@
mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIAMSBoneInfo@mail.nih.gov)

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Bone Health and Osteoporosis: A Guide for Asian Women Age 50 and Older

When you think about your health, you probably do not think about your bones. But keeping your bones healthy and reducing your risk of fractures by preventing osteoporosis is very important throughout life and especially as you get older. Here is some important information to help you.

Risk Factors

Factors that increase your chances of having osteoporosis and fractures include:

- being Asian
- being female
- being older (50+ years)
- low body weight
- menopause or surgery to remove both ovaries before menopause (resulting in lower levels of the hormone estrogen)
- history of fracture as an adult
- close relative with history of fracture as an adult
- long-term low calcium intake
- inadequate physical activity
- current cigarette smoking
- alcoholism
- use of certain medications such as corticosteroids and anticonvulsants
- history of anorexia nervosa.

What Is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that makes bones fragile and more likely to break. There are no symptoms to warn you. The first sign is usually a fracture that occurs after your bones have already

become fragile. Fractures occur most often in the hip, spine, and wrist. Spinal fractures cause stooped posture, loss of height, and chronic back pain. Hip fractures, the most serious consequence of osteoporosis, can result in permanent disability and even death.

You can take steps to protect your bones in your older years. These include a good diet with plenty of calcium and vitamin D, a regular exercise program, a healthy lifestyle, and, sometimes, medication.

Calcium and Vitamin D

You need calcium to help maintain healthy, strong bones throughout your life. Adults need 1,000 mg (milligrams) of calcium every day, increasing to 1,200 mg for men and women age 50 and older.

Many Asian diets are low in calcium. Examples of foods that contain calcium in different amounts include:

- almonds
- bok choy
- broccoli
- calcium-fortified orange juice
- calcium-fortified rice
- calcium-fortified soy milk
- canned salmon with bones
- canned sardines with bones
- milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream
- napa cabbage
- oysters
- sesame seeds
- soybeans
- tofu
- turnip leaves.

Many Asian Americans have trouble digesting milk products. This is called lactose intolerance. If you are lactose intolerant, here are some things you can do:

- Eat dairy foods in small amounts spread out over the day.
- Eat more nondairy, calcium-rich foods.
- Take calcium supplements.
- Use lactase pills, which make milk products more digestible.

Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium. You need 400 to 600 IU (International Units) of vitamin D every day. People can get enough vitamin D from such sources as:

- 15 minutes of exposure to sunlight
- egg yolks
- saltwater fish
- fortified dairy products
- vitamin and mineral supplements.

Exercise

Physical activity is also important to prevent osteoporosis and reduce falls that can result in fractures. Weight-bearing activities can help you maintain strong bones.

Examples include:

- walking
- climbing stairs
- dancing
- weight training.

Other kinds of exercise will help you increase your flexibility and improve your balance to prevent falls. Examples include:

- tai chi
- bike riding
- swimming.

Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that is safe for you. If you have low bone density or osteoporosis, you should protect your spine by avoiding exercises and activities that flex, bend, or twist your spine.

A Healthy Lifestyle

Smoking and drinking too much alcohol are bad for bones. To protect your bones, do not smoke, and if you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

Bone Density Testing

If you are at high risk for osteoporosis, you may want to ask your doctor if a bone density test is right for you. This test will help your doctor decide if you need medication to reduce your risk of fractures.

Bone density tests are quick and painless. You usually do not need to get undressed. The most widely recognized test is called a dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry or DXA test, which measures bone density at the hip and spine. If you are age 65 or older, Medicare may pay for your test. Ask your doctor for more information.

Treatment of Osteoporosis

If bone density testing indicates that you have low bone density or osteoporosis, your doctor may prescribe treatment that includes calcium and vitamin D, exercise, and medication. Medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) include:

- bisphosphonate drugs: alendronate (Fosamax),¹ risedronate (Actonel), ibandronate (Boniva), and zoledronic acid (Reclast)
- calcitonin (Miacalcin and Fortical)
- raloxifene (Evista), a selective estrogen receptor modulator (SERM)
- teriparatide (Forteo), a form of the parathyroid hormone, which is secreted by the parathyroid glands
- estrogen therapy (also called hormone therapy when estrogen and another hormone, progestin, are combined).

These medications provide a variety of choices. Your doctor can help you find the one that is best for you.

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For Your Information

This publication contains information about medications used to treat the health condition discussed here. When this fact sheet was printed, we included the most up-to-date (accurate) information available. Occasionally, new information on medication is released.

For updates and for any questions about any medications you are taking, please contact the Food and Drug Administration at 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332, a toll-free call) or visit its Web site at www.fda.gov.

For updates and questions about statistics, please contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics toll free at 800-232-4636 or visit its Web site at www.cdc.gov/nchs.

Recognizing the National Bone and Joint Decade: 2002-2011

¹ Brand names included in this fact sheet are provided as examples only, and their inclusion does not mean that these products are endorsed by the National Institutes of Health or any other Government agency. Also, if a particular brand name is not mentioned, this does not mean or imply that the product is unsatisfactory.