

# Good bones – not just a woman's issue

## New risk factors, testing guidelines, now include men

The bone-thinning effects of osteoporosis are a common concern as we grow older.

More than 10 million Americans have osteoporosis and 34 million have low bone mass. And it's no longer just a problem for women; osteoporosis can affect anyone.



DR.  
MARIO  
CASTILLO

New guidelines by the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) stress the need for bone density tests – which measure the mass of your bones and their fracture risk – for both men and women. It's estimated that one in two women, and one in eight men, will break a bone by age 50 due to osteoporosis.

Women still make up the vast majority of the population affected by osteoporosis

– 80 percent – but 25 percent of hip fractures occur in men, and as men are living longer, the percentage of men experiencing fractures due to weakened bones is climbing.

Some bone loss is a natural part of aging, but osteoporosis is a condition in which the bones become very thin and weak, which significantly increases your risk of bone fracture and serious injury. Up until age 30, our bodies make new bone mass at a rate faster than old bone is broken down. However, as we age, bone begins to break down faster than new bone is made. In women, this typically occurs soon after menopause, as bone-fortifying hormones like estrogen decrease; and in men, between the ages of 45 and 50.

A related condition known as osteopenia – bones that are thinning, but not thin enough to be diagnosed as full-blown osteoporosis –

presents health risks, as well. Half of all fractures due to bone loss occur in people with osteopenia.

Bone density testing has long been recommended for women ages 65 and older. Now, the NOF has published guidelines recommending that men also begin this routine test, beginning at age 70.

A bone density test uses special X-rays to measure the amount of calcium and other bone minerals contained in a segment of bone. The test is easy and painless and generally performed on those bones most likely to break due to osteoporosis: the lower spine, the femur bone adjoining the hip, and the bones of the wrist and forearm.

Industry recommendations have been updated to be more inclusive regarding those people who should be tested, and also use new methods for calculating the level at which fracture risk becomes high enough to make bone-building drugs a cost-effective and reasonable solution. In addition to a routine bone check for older men, the guidelines recom-

• Broken bones due to osteoporosis account for more than 432,000 hospital admissions and nearly 2.5 million doctor's office visits each year.

• It's estimated that one in two women, and one in eight men, will break a bone by age 50 due to osteoporosis.

mend:

- Treating post-menopausal women and men 50 and older who have thinning bones, but not osteoporosis, as though they have a 20 percent risk of a major fracture in the next decade, or at least a 3 percent risk of a hip fracture.

- Monitoring men and post-menopausal women ages 50 and over for osteoporosis risk factors to determine the need for a bone density test before their senior years.

- Administering a bone density test to anyone over age 50 who has had any type of fracture or who has conditions linked to bone loss, such as rheumatoid arthritis.

- A diet rich in calcium or daily vitamin supplements.

- Regular weight-bearing exercise to strengthen muscles and increase bone mass.

- Avoid excessive alcohol intake or smoking.

Adopting healthy habits

now can minimize your risk – or slow the progression of osteoporosis, if you've already been diagnosed. Talk with your doctor to create a diet, exercise and lifestyle plan that works for you.

Bone density testing is available close to home at Scenic Mountain Medical Center (SMMC). Radiology Director at the facility, Vivian Gordon, reports that the hospital recently upgraded its bone density testing equipment. According to Gordon, "Scheduling is convenient and your doctor will receive the results of your test quickly."

While board certified radiologist Dr. Mario Castillo joined the SMMC medical staff in September 2007, he has practiced for 20 years, interpreting diagnostic images to quickly identify health problems. He enjoys hiking and regularly "walks the mountain" at Big Spring State Park.