

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is often called a “silent disease” as there are no signs or symptoms until a fracture occurs. As we age, the building of new bone in our body slows drastically though the breakdown of bone continues. As this happens, the bones become more porous and less dense and they are more likely to break. Fractures that occur to osteoporotic bone are a type of Fragility Fracture. These fractures occur from falls at a standing height or less.

There are many risk factors that can contribute to osteoporosis. Heredity and ethnicity both play a role, and therefore anyone over the age of 50 may be at risk. Some of this is due to a decrease in estrogen in women (especially for those who went through early menopause) and low testosterone in men. Not enough calcium or vitamin D can contribute to osteoporosis, since those are the building blocks for making strong bones. High doses of long-term steroids can thin your bones. Smoking and excessive intake of alcohol can also be damaging to the bones. A lack of weight bearing activity can cause your bones to thin as well. Some medical conditions may make you more susceptible to osteoporosis, including Diabetes, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Crohn's or Celiac Disease. Osteoporosis can be very debilitating to the elderly.

The screening test for osteoporosis is a Bone Mineral Density Scan known as a DEXA Scan. Osteopenia is a condition of bone thinning that is not as severe as osteoporosis, but may also require treatment or preventative measures. Treatment can be handled by your primary care provider or through the bone density clinics, such as Holland Hospital Bone Health Services.

The good news is, there are things you can do to treat and help prevent osteoporosis.

- **Talk to your doctor.** If you have had a recent fracture and you are concerned, talk to your doctor. Tests can be ordered to check the density of your bones. Based on the results, treatments can be started.
- **Get your intake of calcium.** In addition to supplements, calcium-rich foods include milk, cheese and yogurt. Other non-dairy options include broccoli, almonds and sardines. Adults without osteoporosis should get at least 1,000mg of calcium daily.
- **Get your Vitamin D.** Vitamin D naturally occurs in our exposure to sunlight. Vitamin D helps to absorb calcium and therefore you may need supplementation to help meet the required amount. Tests can be ordered by your doctor to check your Vitamin D level.
- **Exercise daily.** Weight bearing activity and weight lifting exercises will help to improve your bone density. Although low-weight bearing activity is beneficial for those trying to manage their arthritic pain, it does not help increase bone density.
- **Medications.** For people who have osteoporosis there are medications that can help to treat it. Your doctor or a bone health specialist may recommend a medication for you.