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Osteoporosis/Osteopenia



Osteoporosis is often described as a pediatric disease that manifests itself in old age. However, osteoporosis is not, and should not, be considered part of the normal aging process. The word osteoporosis means porous bone; and is defined as a metabolic bone disease that is characterized by low bone mass and microarchitectural deterioration of bone tissue leading to enhanced bone fragility and a consequent increase in fracture risk. What does this mean? Simply, this definition means the thinning of bone to the point of fracture. Osteoporosis is also known as a silent disease, because symptoms are usually absent until a fracture occurs. Fractures usually present in the hip, spine or wrist, though any bone can be affected. [Risk factors](#) affect an individual's ability to develop and maintain peak bone mass.

The level of bone mass an individual has determines if they have healthy bones, osteopenia (low bone mass), or osteoporosis. Osteopenia is a precursor to osteoporosis. The doctor, based upon your test results, will determine if you have low bone mass or osteoporosis.

According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, osteoporosis and low bone mass are currently estimated to be a major public health threat for almost 44 million U.S. women and men aged 50 and older, representing 55% of the people aged 50 and older in the United States. In Missouri, the Foundation projects the 2010 prevalence for osteoporosis at 61,300 men and 200,400 women age 50 and over.

What causes osteopenia and osteoporosis? Several factors contribute to the function and health of bone, including genetics, lifestyle, and other chronic diseases. What can you modify to reduce your risk of developing osteopenia, osteoporosis, and bone fractures? Lifestyle changes can greatly reduce an individual's risk for developing osteopenia, osteoporosis, and future fracture risk. Changes include:

- Consuming the recommended levels of calcium and vitamin D ([Link](#))
- Participating in a regular, weight bearing, physical activity program several times a week. This includes dancing, walking, lifting weights, low-impact aerobics, etc.
- Consuming a balanced diet
- Eliminating smoking
- Limiting the intake of caffeinated, carbonated, or alcoholic beverages
- Talking to your physician about your risk of these diseases
- Staying on a treatment regimen if diagnosed
- Taking steps to prevent falls in your home, around your home, and in the workplace.