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Osteoporosis – The Silent Thief

Osteoporosis is a silent disease which results in loss of bone, slowly over years. Often neither the patient nor the doctor is aware of its presence until a bone snaps unexpectedly.

Osteoporosis leads to 1.5 million fractures annually, mostly in the hip, spine, and wrist. It is the primary cause of hip fracture which can lead to permanent disability, loss of independence, and even death. Spinal fractures cause stooped posture and Dowager's Hump. 34 Million Americans are threatened, mostly older women. 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men over the age of 50 will suffer a vertebral fracture.

Fortunately, the outlook for this condition is brightening. It is no longer viewed as an inevitable consequence of aging. Diagnosis and treatment need no longer wait until bones break. Most importantly, early intervention can prevent devastating fractures.

Osteoporosis can be diagnosed painlessly, and non-invasively. A DEXA scan, or bone density test is the best and most common test used to diagnose this condition. Your doctor will help you determine if a DEXA scan should be performed. Generally it will be recommended for

- 1) Women aged 65 and older
- 2) Younger postmenopausal women who have risk factors
- 3) Postmenopausal women who present with fractures

Some factors which increase the risk of osteoporosis are beyond a person's control.

- 1) Being female: 5X the risk of men
- 2) Thin with a small frame
- 3) A family history of broken bones or stooped posture in older family members
- 4) Menopause before the age of 45
- 5) White or Asian ancestry

- 6) Advanced age
- 7) Prolonged use of certain medications

Other factors which increase the risk of osteoporosis are controllable.

- 1) Lack of Calcium and Vitamin D
- 2) Sedentary lifestyle
- 3) Smoking
- 4) Excess alcohol consumption

If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis, treatment is now readily available. Drugs called Bisphosphonates (Fosomax, Actonel, Boniva), may be taken orally as infrequently as once monthly. For patients unable to tolerate the oral medication, intravenous administration as infrequently as once annually is available. In some cases, other types of medication may also be used. Injectable medication to be self administered daily (Forteo), is available for particularly severe osteoporosis.

Diet and Exercise are equally important as treatment. Calcium and Vitamin D are integral parts of any treatment regimen. Eat foods naturally rich in Calcium such as green, leafy vegetables and dairy products. If you don't eat dairy you can consume foods fortified with Calcium such as orange juice, or use Calcium supplements. Aim for 1200-1500mg of Calcium daily. Be sure to get in the habit of weight-bearing exercise such as walking or biking.

Osteoporosis has been described as a Geriatric disease with its onset in adolescence. Develop good habits early, be aware of your risk factors, and discuss your personal situation with your doctor.

For more information, please visit <http://www.safecare.com>.

Richard J. Wilbur, M.D. is Board Certified in Internal Medicine.

Office Hours:

Mondays 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM,

Tuesdays 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM

Wednesdays 9:00 AM - 7:30 PM

Thursdays 9:00 AM - 12:15 PM

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Alternate Saturdays 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

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