

Osteoporosis

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Osteoporosis-DIRECT

Osteoporosis, Details

Osteoporosis is also called "brittle bone disease." The term osteoporosis literally means "porous bone." Osteoporosis is a common, though serious, condition that **affects** as many as 15 million to 20 million individuals in the United States.

In people over 45 years of age osteoporosis is said to contribute to an estimated 1.3 million bone fractures a year (roughly 70 percent of all fractures that occur in this **age group**).

In osteoporosis, bone mass decreases. This decrease causes bones to be more susceptible to fracture. A fall, blow, or **lifting** action that would not normally bruise or strain the average person can easily break one or more bones in someone with severe osteoporosis.

The spine, wrist, and hip are the most common sites of osteoporosis-related fractures, although any bone of the body may be **affected**.

When the bones of the spinal column (the vertebrae) are weakened, a simple action like bending forward to make a bed or lifting a heavy roast pan out of the oven can be enough to cause a "crush fracture" or "spinal compression fracture." These vertebral crush fractures often cause back pain, decreased height, and a humped back or a "dowager's hump."

The occurrence of osteoporosis of the spine increases with age. According to the National Institute of Arthritis and

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Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, one study of a group of about 2,000 women showed x-ray evidence of osteoporosis in the spine in about: 1. 29 percent of those age 45 to 54 years 2. 61 percent of those age 55 to 64, and 3. 79 percent of those age 65 and older.

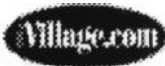
Vertebral crush fractures are more common in women than men and generally occur in women between 55 and 75 years of age. Wrist fractures also occur commonly among people with this disorder. For example, an otherwise healthy, vigorous woman in her fifties or sixties slips on ice, falls, reaches out to catch herself, and is taken to the emergency room with a broken wrist.

Osteoporosis is often the underlying cause of the broken hips suffered by more than 200,000 Americans over age 45 each year. A fall from a standing position can fracture a hip weakened by osteoporosis. In cases of severe osteoporosis, a change of posture or weight distribution alone can actually break the hip, and the fracture then causes a fall.


People who have hip fractures due to osteoporosis are generally older than people who suffer spinal fractures. There is more even distribution between women and men than with vertebral fractures, the rates for hip fractures being two to three times higher in women than in men.

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