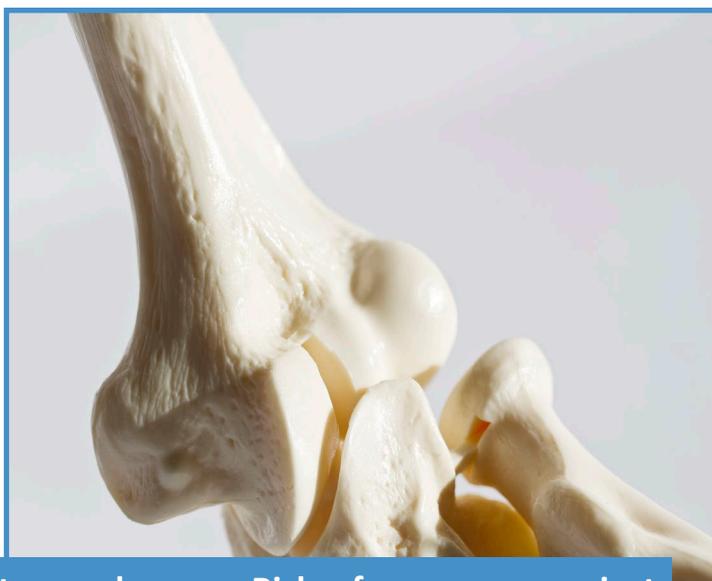


Osteoporosis: causes and increased risk



There are several contributing risk factors and causes. Risk, of course, means just that: increased risk. So, people with high blood pressure do not necessarily end up with strokes, and people with osteoporosis do not always end up with fractures. And, like hypertension, osteoporosis can be prevented by timely intervention. The occurrence of osteoporosis varies with age, gender, and ethnicity.

How to assess osteoporosis risk

- **Age:** Osteoporosis is found increasingly in people as they get older. In the western world it is thought that more than 50 per cent of women after the menopause could have lower than normal bone mass, and more than 20 per cent could have osteoporosis. The average age of women entering the menopause in the western world is around 51 years. The number of fractures, particularly in women, increases progressively with age, due largely to osteoporosis.
- **Gender:** Women are substantially more affected than men as their peak bone mass (highest level of bone mass ever reached in a person's life) is lower than that of men in the first instance. They then also lose bone mass far more rapidly than men after the menopause.
- **Ethnicity:** African heritage contributes to a higher bone mass than Caucasian or Asian heritage and, in addition, their loss of bone mass may be slower than in Caucasians and Asians, and subsequently, have a lower risk of osteoporosis.

The three factors mentioned above could possibly be classified more as risk factors than causes of osteoporosis.

Other risk factors include:

- **Hormonal factors:** Women who did not have children, started menstruating late, and stopped menstruating early are at increased risk of getting osteoporosis. Women who did not see their menstrual periods for lengthy spells of time, irrespective of the cause, are also in a high-risk category.
- **Genetic predisposition:** Significant here would be a strong family history of osteoporosis. Ethnicity factors could also fit into this category.
- **Nutrition:** A low calcium and vitamin D intake would be relevant here. The aged are often neglected with poor diets due to a variety of reasons, and this can put them at an even higher risk of getting osteoporosis. High salt and caffeine intake can also aggravate matters.
- **Lifestyle:** An inactive lifestyle with alcohol abuse and smoking is bad news for anybody at any time, and definitely so for the person at risk of osteoporosis.
- **Size of body:** People of small, slender build are at higher risk than others.

If you have any of these risk factors, it's time to speak to your doctor about checking your bone density and then taking the necessary steps for protection against this condition.