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**January 31, 2011**

# WELLNESS WEEKLY

## Healthy Bones



Osteoporosis, which means "porous bones," causes bones to become weak and brittle — so brittle that a fall or even mild stresses like bending over or coughing can cause a fracture. In many cases, bones weaken when you have low levels of calcium and other minerals in your bones.

A common result of osteoporosis is fractures — most of them occur in the spine, hip or wrist. Although it's often thought of as a women's disease, osteoporosis affects men too. And aside from people who have osteoporosis, many others have low bone density, putting them at risk of developing osteoporosis.

In the early stages of bone loss, you usually have no pain or other symptoms. But once bones have been weakened by osteoporosis, you may have osteoporosis signs and symptoms that include:

- Back pain, which can be severe, as a result of a fractured or collapsed vertebra
- Loss of height over time
- A stooped posture
- Fracture of the vertebra, wrist, hip or other bone

How likely you are to develop osteoporosis depends on how much bone mass you attained in your 20's and early 30's (peak bone mass) and how rapidly you lose it later. The higher your peak bone mass, the more bone you have "in the bank" and the less likely you are to develop osteoporosis as you age. The strength of your bones depends on their size and density; bone density depends in part on the amount of calcium, phosphorus and other minerals bones contain. When your bones contain fewer minerals than normal, they're less strong and eventually lose their internal supporting structure.

Other factors, such as hormone levels, also affect bone density. In women, when estrogen levels drop at menopause, bone loss increases dramatically. In men, low estrogen and testosterone levels can cause a loss of bone mass.

### Risk factors you can change:

- Low calcium intake
- Tobacco use.
- Eating disorders.
- Sedentary lifestyle.
- Excessive alcohol consumption.

### Risk factors you can't change:

- Being a woman.
- Age.
- Race.
- Family history.
- Frame size.

### Three factors essential for keeping your bones healthy throughout your life are:

- Adequate amounts of calcium
- Adequate amounts of vitamin D
- Regular exercise