

Patient Guide

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a silent disease until a fracture occurs. Osteoporosis is a disease characterized by a reduced density and quality of bone occurring silently and progressively. Consequently, as bones become more porous, the susceptibility to fractures increases significantly. Usually, osteoporotic patients do not complain of symptoms until first fragility fracture occurs (classical sites are: the spine, the wrist and the hip).

How common is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a very common disease. It is estimated that an osteoporotic fracture occurs every 3 seconds worldwide. One in three women and one in five men will have a fracture after age 50 yrs. For women this risk is higher than the risk of breast, ovarian and uterine cancer combined. For men, the risk is higher than that for prostate cancer.

Who is at risk?

Populations at higher risk include: women, men and women over 65-years-old, individuals with history of fragility fractures, history of smoking, alcohol abuse, cortisone therapy, individuals with parental history of hip fracture, and individuals with certain medical conditions or taking certain medications known to cause accelerated bone loss (e.g. Glucocorticoids, cancer treatments, anti-depressants, anti-epileptic drugs, etc).

Prevention

Osteoporosis prevention is a continuous process that should start early in childhood. Although some risk factors, such as aging and gender, cannot be controlled; others are linked to lifestyle modifiable determinants. These include poor nutrition, insufficient physical activity, smoking, excessive alcohol drinking, intake of carbonated beverages, high salt diets, excess caffeine intake, all of which can negatively affect bone density and possibly increase fracture risk.

Diagnosis and Treatment

DEXA, described earlier, is the most common technique for assessing the risk of osteoporosis. Several effective treatments are commonly used to treat osteoporosis, yet this has to be indicated based on individualized clinical assessment and must be associated with relevant lifestyle changes as recommended by the patient's physician.