

# Reading the Bones on Osteoporosis

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A Science of Medicine  
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With between 4 and 6 million South Africans potentially prone to the disease, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men, Osteoporosis is not to be taken lightly.

Once considered a normal part of ageing, and accepted as such, increased research has shown that Osteoporosis can also affect younger people. It is a serious chronic condition and the cause of much pain and suffering. Up to 20% of people die after a hip fracture and more than 50% of the rest will never live independently again. However with the proper knowledge and care, Osteoporosis can be prevented and if you already suffer from the illness, it can be treated with a variety of available medications and through appropriate lifestyle changes

## What is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a condition characterized by the loss of the normal density of bone, resulting in fragile bone. It is a condition that leads to bones becoming more porous, which, in turn, increases susceptibility to fractures of especially the spine, hip and wrist.

Osteoporosis is called the Silent Epidemic because there are usually no symptoms until you fracture a bone. Often, the condition can be present without detection for decades. Giving the body the correct bone-building material from early on in life is thus a necessity in the approach towards Osteoporosis.

## What factors determine bone strength?

Bone density is the amount of bone present in the skeletal structure. Generally the higher the bone density, the stronger the bones. Bone density is greatly influenced by genetic factors, and over time by environmental factors and medication. Men have a higher bone density than women and are therefore less prone to Osteoporosis. Added to this, estrogen is important in maintaining bone density in women. When estrogen levels drop after menopause, bone loss accelerates. During the first five to ten years after menopause, women can lose between 2 and 4% of bone density per year. This accelerated bone loss is a major cause of osteoporosis in older women.

## Factors that will increase the risk of developing osteoporosis are:

- \* Excessive dryness
- \* Family history of osteoporosis
- \* Cigarette smoking
- \* Excessive alcohol consumption;
- \* Lack of exercise
- \* Diet low in calcium
- \* Poor nutrition and excessive dieting
- \* Chronic inflammation, due to diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis
- \* Vitamin D deficiency.

## Tibb and Osteoporosis

In line with illnesses that affect the joints and bones, such as osteoarthritis, Tibb views Osteoporosis as an illness related to excessive dryness in the body. As the life cycle undergoes its natural progression, the body loses moisture. This is one of the reasons that Osteoporosis is associated with people who are more matured and

especially in women, who are post-menopausal. If one is aware of the Temperaments, (A person's temperament is a combination of physical characteristics, psychological, emotional, and spiritual attributes), it becomes clear that those who are melancholic, i.e have a temperament of cold and dry, will be most pre-disposed to Osteoporosis. People with this temperament are generally, thin-framed and tend to suffer from dryness. However, lifestyles today, wherein people eat excessively dry foods, are constantly under stress and do not get sufficient sleep also play a devastating role in stripping the body of moisture. In effect, this means that any of the Temperaments could be prone to illnesses such as Osteoporosis as a result of poor living habits.

#### What can be done- Prevention and Treatment

The goal of osteoporosis treatment is the prevention of bone fractures by stopping bone loss and by increasing bone strength. Although early detection and treatment can substantially decrease the risk of future fractures, none of the available treatments for osteoporosis are complete cures. In other words, it is difficult to completely rebuild bone that has been weakened. Therefore, prevention of osteoporosis is as important as treatment. Osteoporosis treatment and prevention measures are:

Implementing Lifestyle changes and finding suitable treatment as soon as possible.

#### Some useful advice about lifestyle changes that can prevent Osteoporosis or lessen the effects if you are a sufferer are:

- ∑ Maintain a steady weight. Whilst people who are thin are more prone, being overweight is equally dangerous as there is too much strain on the bones and joints.
- ∑ Stay active- Walk 3-4 times a week and try to do some light resistance training or Pilates. Bear in mind that excessive exercise will also be damaging to the body, as there is a risk of damaging bones.
- ∑ Eat well- Foods such as Salmon, sardines, broccoli, nuts, figs, prunes, leafy green vegetables, yoghurt, beans and fruit high in Vitamin C, are recommended. Using less salt would also be beneficial.
- ∑ Warm milk is also an option. Furthermore, cut down on caffeine.
- ∑ Consider a Calcium and Vitamin D supplement.
- ∑ Have regular massages with warming, moisturising oils.
- ∑ Get sufficient sleep.
- ∑ Women should consider using a natural product such as Tibb- Menoherb after menopause.

Whilst the statistics are high, there is hope for those with Osteoporosis. Empowering yourself starts with knowledge and the wisdom to act upon it. Change your lifestyle today...the strength is in your bones!