



## **Patient Information Sheet: Osteoporosis**

### **What is osteoporosis?**

- Osteoporosis results from an ongoing loss of bone making your bones thin, brittle and easily breakable.
- Over time the vertebrae in your spine may collapse causing you to lose height.
- You may also develop a forward stoop because of your spine rounding forward.
- Fractures of the hip are common in patients with osteoporosis and result in hospitalization.

### **How common is osteoporosis?**

- Over 800,000 Canadians, mostly older women, have osteoporosis.

### **What causes osteoarthritis?**

- Aging
  - Bone is a living tissue that is continually growing and being remodelled. At about age 40, more bone is removed than is made.
- Family History
  - Members of your family may have had osteoporosis. As well, if you are not a big person, that is to say you have a small frame, that may also increase your chances of having osteoporosis.
- Lack of exercise.
  - Bone needs exercise (walking, bending, stretching) to stay strong.
- Loss of estrogen
  - Estrogen is a hormone that is important to maintain bone strength. Once women enter the menopause, their estrogen levels fall and this affects the way in which their bones process calcium. This leads to a more rapid loss of bone. In men, low levels of the hormone testosterone may cause osteoporosis.

- Diet
  - A poor diet without foods rich in calcium contributes to bone loss.
- Habits
  - Alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, and some sodas can lead to bone loss.
- Medication
  - Some medications, especially cortisone preparations, can contribute to bone loss. You should tell your doctor what medication you are taking.
- Other Illnesses
  - An over-active thyroid and rheumatoid arthritis may also contribute to bone loss.

### **How do you know if you have osteoporosis?**

- If you have a sharp pain in your spine, ribs, hip, or wrist following a fall that does not go away, you should see your doctor.
- Another symptom is sudden back pain, which is usually a result of a fracture of a vertebra.
- Your doctor will perform an examination as well as blood and urine tests. X-rays may also be required.
- Other tests may be used to measure the density of your bone (bone densitometry).

### **How is osteoarthritis treated?**

- A combination of hormone replacement therapy, medication, diet, exercise, attention to posture and education may form part of the treatment plan.

### *Medication*

- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) reduces the rate of bone loss.
- Bisphosphonates are helpful in rebuilding bone. They are very good for women who cannot or do not want to take HRT.
- Calcitonin is a natural human hormone. It helps increase bone density and is also a strong pain reliever for pain resulting from spine fractures. However, it has not yet been approved for use in Canada for treating osteoporosis.

For medications prescribed by your doctor, it is important to know:

Name(s) (generic and brand):

How much to take:

When to take it:

How quickly will it work:

For how long should it be taken:

Side effects to look out for:

### *Diet*

- A diet rich in calcium is necessary.
- Foods rich in calcium are milk, cheese, yoghurt, canned salmon with bones, sardines, almonds, dark green leafy vegetables and broccoli. You may want to consult with a dietitian to find out ways of increasing your calcium intake.

### *Exercise*

- Exercise helps rebuild bone and strengthens muscles.
- Walking, dancing, low-impact aerobics and stationary cycling are all good forms of exercise.
- Your doctor or physical therapist will help you find the exercise that meets your needs best.

- Being aware of risks for falling may also help you avoid a fracture.

**For more information...**

This fact sheet is just a brief look at osteoporosis. For more information or if you have any questions, ask your doctor or call The Arthritis Society at 1-800-321-1433. You can also visit The Arthritis Society's website at [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca).

Questions to ask your doctor at your next visit:

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