

Blokes, Bones and Breaks

Consumer Factsheet



What is the state of men's bones in Australia?

Osteoporosis is often seen as a woman's disease but men suffer too. Around 250,000 men in Australia have osteoporosis and this is expected to increase. Men account for 30% of all fractures that occur in people over 50. Osteoporosis can be prevented and treated. Taking early action is the most effective way of preventing a broken bone.

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a condition where bones lose their density and become weaker, leading to a higher risk of a break. A minor fall, twist of the back or even bumping into something can be enough to break a bone. In men, common sites for breaks are the spine, hip and wrist, but other bones can also be affected.

Are you at risk of having osteoporosis?

Your bone health needs to be checked and monitored, just like any other health issue. If you have any of these osteoporosis risk factors, you should see your doctor for a bone health check-up.

Personal risk factors	Medical conditions*	Medications*	Lifestyle/health issues
Family history (parent or sibling)	Low testosterone	Treatments for prostate cancer	Smoking
Previous fracture (from a minor bump or fall)	Coeliac disease or absorption problems	Glucocorticoids (steroids)	Excessive alcohol
Loss of height (3cm or more)	Chronic liver or kidney disease	Anti-epilepsy drugs	Being inactive
	Overactive thyroid or parathyroid gland	Some anti-depressants	Obesity
	Rheumatoid arthritis		Low body weight
	Diabetes		

* The most common risk factors are shown

Top Tips for Men – Looking After Your Bone Health

- Talk to your doctor, know your risk factors and take early action – it's your best defence against breaks.
- Get enough calcium, vitamin D and exercise – the three essential ingredients for strong bones.
- Look after your general health – stop smoking, moderate drinking, maintain a healthy weight and stay active in your daily life.



Low testosterone

The male hormone testosterone helps maintain strong bones. Low testosterone can increase your risk of osteoporosis and breaking a bone. Some men lose testosterone as they age and testosterone levels may also be affected by certain medications e.g: androgen deprivation therapy for prostate cancer. Your doctor may refer you for a blood test if low testosterone levels are suspected. Low testosterone can be treated.

Back pain and loss of height

Many men experience back pain due to muscle strain or disc damage. In some cases, particularly if accompanied by loss of height (3cm or more), back pain may be a sign of a fracture in the spine due to osteoporosis. If your doctor suspects a spinal fracture, you will be referred for a back X-ray.

Talk to your doctor

If over 50 you should talk to your doctor about your bone health. Your doctor will review risk factors and existing medical conditions or medications that may affect your bones. It is important to mention new back pain or any changes in height or posture. You should also discuss any bone breaks you have experienced after a minor bump or fall, or any history of osteoporosis in your family.

How will your bone health be tested?

If your doctor thinks you are at risk of osteoporosis, you will be referred for a bone density test.

This simple scan measures the density of the bones in the hip and spine. The results will indicate if your bone density is normal, mildly reduced (*osteopenia*) or if you have osteoporosis.

How is osteoporosis treated?

If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis your doctor will determine the best treatment. Osteoporosis medications can reduce the risk of fractures by up to 60% and are safe and effective for most people. Osteoporosis medications are usually prescribed over several years and only work if taken as directed.

Bone Tips for Men

It is never too late to look after your bones. Calcium, vitamin D and exercise are important for strong bones.

Calcium – are you getting enough?

Calcium is fundamental to the strength and structure of bone. If the body does not get enough calcium from diet to maintain other essential functions, it's removed from the bones to make up the shortfall. Over time this can lead to loss of bone density

and osteoporosis. Consuming high calcium food such as dairy is important - three serves of dairy food per day will help you reach recommended levels. Adult men require 1000mg of calcium per day. Men over 70 need 1300mg per day. If your diet is calcium deficient, your doctor may suggest calcium supplements. Osteoporosis Australia recommends a supplement of 500-600mg of calcium per day.

Vitamin D – what's the story?

Vitamin D helps your body to absorb calcium from food. It also helps keep muscles strong and reduces the risk of falls in older men. The most common source of vitamin D is from sunlight - very little is found in food. The amount of sun exposure needed depends on the season, your skin type and your location in Australia. In summer, 5-10 minutes mid-morning or afternoon is enough for fair-skinned people. In winter, 7-30 minutes at midday is sufficient, depending on your location. People with darker skin need longer exposure. Your doctor may refer you for a blood test if you are at risk of vitamin D deficiency. A supplement may be needed to improve your vitamin D level.

Exercise – what works for bones?

Placing stress on bones through exercise helps to maintain and improve bone density. Exercise also improves muscle strength, posture and balance, which reduces risk of falls in older men.

Weight-bearing and resistance exercises are best for bones.

Weight bearing exercises	Resistance exercises
Running	Gym equipment
Brisk or uphill walking	Hand or ankle weights
Jumping	
Tennis, football, basketball and similar sports	

Exercise tip for healthy adults: A variety of weight bearing and resistance training, at least 30 minutes, 3-5 times per week.

Exercise tip for diagnosed osteoporosis (no previous fracture): A combination of weight-bearing and supervised resistance training and challenging balance exercises. If you have osteoporosis and have experienced a fracture, consult your doctor and physiotherapist about a supervised exercise program.

References

Ebeling PR et al. for Osteoporosis Australia. Building healthy bones throughout life: an evidence-informed strategy to prevent osteoporosis in Australia. *Med J Aust Open* 2013;2:Suppl 1.
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