

Osteoporosis and your diet

Although osteoporosis usually only manifests in old age, many of the factors that predispose men, and particularly women, to develop this disease play a role from as early as the teenage years.

Risk factors for developing osteoporosis:

- Gender. Women generally have less bone tissue and lose bone more rapidly than men, especially after menopause.
- Age. Bones become less dense as one ages.
- A lower peak bone density, which occurs at about 30 years of age.
- An inactive lifestyle.
- Smoking.
- Excessive alcohol use.
- Certain long-term medication use, such as steroids.
- A family history of osteoporosis.
- Illnesses and conditions that affect nutrition and absorption.

Osteoporosis often has no or few symptoms and the first sign of its presence may, in fact, be a fracture of a bone.

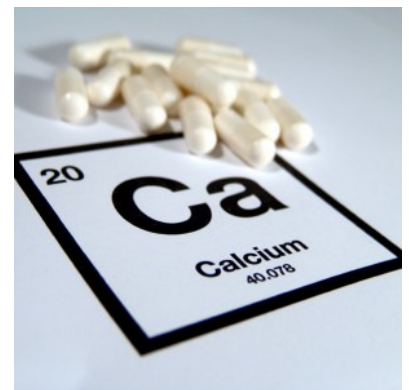
Steps to prevent osteoporosis

We can't influence our genetic makeup, our gender, race, or age, but it is possible to take precautions which can prevent osteoporosis.

- **Calcium is king** - Make sure that you take in sufficient calcium. All young people from age 14 upwards need between 1000 and 1500 mg of calcium daily in order to build up maximum bone density. Milk, cheese, sardines, tofu and green vegetables are good sources of calcium.
- **Supplement solution** - Postmenopausal women over 40 should take in about 1500 mg of elemental calcium per day. If it is difficult to make this part of your daily diet, a good calcium supplement, that contains at least 500 mg of elemental calcium per tablet, should be considered.



- **Feast on phosphates** - Talk to your pharmacist about using biphosphonates (such as alendronate or alendronic acid), which delay the breakdown of bone cells. Grains, legumes, fish, meat and dairy products are rich in phosphates.
- **Sunlight strategy** - Make sure that you get enough vitamin D. Most South Africans are exposed to sufficient sunlight in order to produce vitamin D. However, older people who spend a lot of time indoors often need additional vitamin D.
- **Magnesium magic** - Additional magnesium may be needed by diabetics, alcoholics and people who take diuretics. Nuts, seeds and whole grains are all rich in magnesium.
- **Get moving.** Exercise at least twice per week. Weight-bearing exercises such as running, and resistance training, where you have to push against your body weight or against weights, apparatus or elastic bands, are essential for building strong bone structure.
- **Avoid alcohol**
- **Stop smoking**



A note on CALCIUM supplementation:

- Calcium supplements are best absorbed if taken in small amounts throughout the day and with meals (calcium carbonate needs the presence of stomach acid to split from its salt, in order to get absorbed).
- Avoid taking more than 500mg at one time.
- Avoid taking calcium together with foods known to impair its absorption (e.g. fibre, oxalates, phytates, bulk-forming laxatives.).
- Calcium supplementation is safe and generally free of side-effects- constipation can occur – increase your fluid and fiber intake, as well as exercise regularly.
- There is no evidence, even in individuals with a personal or family history of kidney stones, that calcium supplementation causes kidney stones. If you take more than 2000mg per day and also in conjunction with Vitamin D, your urine calcium will increase and kidney stones may develop. Consult your doctor if this is the case and have your urine calcium levels monitored.

