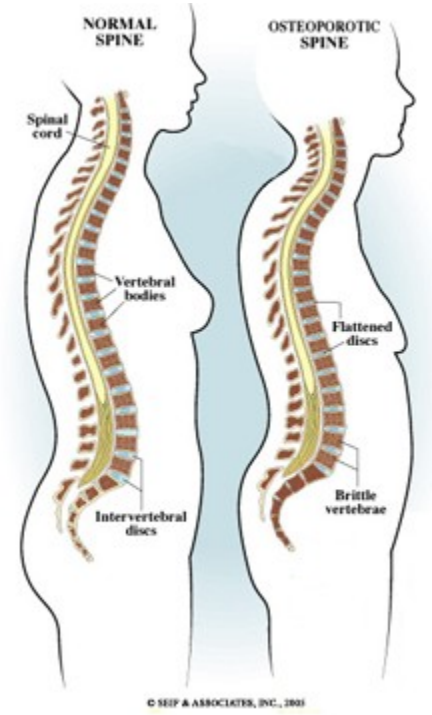
# Osteoporosis and Fractures

Your bones are living structures. They can become stronger or weaker over time due to a number of factors. With osteoporosis (means “porous bones”), your bones can be so brittle that they can break with minimal stress. Osteopenia is a less severe weakness of the bones, which places you at risk for osteoporosis. It is important to identify if you have osteoporosis or osteopenia. Bone fractures from osteoporosis (especially hip and spine) are a major cause of hospitalization, loss of independence and death.




Your goals are to: preventing falls, and prevent or treat weak bones.

## ROLE OF FALLS

Fractures occur in only a small percent of older persons who fall, even though at least 30 to 40 percent of the elderly have osteoporosis. A fall of just a few feet may cause a fracture in a person with low bone density. At least one fall per year occurs in 30 percent of persons, 70 years of age or older.

## FALL PREVENTION

There are a number of things you can do to avoid or prevent falls:

- If you are unsteady on your feet, use a cane or walker, or walk with someone's help.
- Remove loose rugs or electrical cords.
- Keep your home well lit at night. Use glasses if you need them!
- Avoid icy streets and wet or waxed floors.
- Hold the railing when using stairs.
- Watch out for your pets.
- Install grab bars in your bathroom.
- Exercise: physical activity, especially weight bearing exercise helps strengthen bones. Strength and balance exercise (Tai Chi for example ) helps to prevent falls.
- Alcohol use and the use of some medications can make you more likely to fall. Discuss your alcohol use with your caregiver. Ask your caregiver if any of your medications might increase your risk for falling. Ask if safer alternatives are available.

## BONE HEALTH

The health and strength of your bones can be checked with a DEXA scan (bone density x-ray), or with a specialized CT scan. Your caregiver will help you determine whether, and how often, this should be done. This can determine if you have osteoporosis or osteopenia. If so, other tests may be needed to determine the cause of your weak bones.

You can do a number of things to keep your bones healthy and strong:

- Have adequate calcium and Vitamin D in your diet.
- **Do not** smoke! If you smoke, ask for help to stop.
- Exercise, especially weight bearing exercise, to strengthen bones. Strength and balance exercise (for example, Tai Chi) helps to prevent falls.
- Some medical conditions (menopause, kidney disease, steroid treatment and others) can weaken your bones. Talk about bone health with your caregiver. Also discuss any medications you take and whether they can weaken you bones.
- If you do have osteoporosis or osteopenia, be sure to discuss treatment options with your caregiver.

## HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Avoid falls.
- **Do not** smoke! If you smoke, ask for help to stop.
- You should have adequate calcium and Vitamin D in your diet (speak with your caregiver about amounts).
- Before exercising, ask your caregiver what is okay for you.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have had a fracture and your pain is not well controlled.
- You have had a fracture and you are not able get back to activities as expected.
- You have re-injured yourself.
- You develop side effects from medications (especially stomach pain or swallow trouble while on oral osteoporosis medication).
- You develop new unexplained problems.

**SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:**

- You develop sudden, severe pain in your back.
- You develop pain after an injury or fall.

Document Released: 11/10/2005 Document Re-Released: 01/09/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.