

ROCK MY MEN♀PAUSE

Bone health and the menopause

In women, the decline of general bone health speeds up once their regular menstrual periods stop with the menopause, due to the decline in the hormone oestrogen. Osteoporosis is the process that describes the thinning of the bones, causing them to become less dense and strong. As a result, the bones are more fragile and liable to break.

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Osteoporosis becomes more common as we get older. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is an effective way of replacing the declining oestrogen, helping to maintain the density and strength of the bones. These positive impacts continue for as long as the woman remains on HRT treatment.

Women who go through an early menopause (before the age of 40 years) are more likely to suffer with osteoporosis and, as a result, fractures. This is one of the reasons why HRT is prescribed to this group of women.

Keep your bones healthy

It is important to consider other factors that impact on bone health – especially in the time approaching the menopause, as well as once the periods have stopped entirely. There are many lifestyle changes that can be made to improve bone health, including:

- 1** Eating a balanced, healthy diet: This includes consuming calcium in food products such as yoghurt, tofu and leafy green vegetables.
- 2** Topping up on Vitamin D levels: Vitamin D is absorbed through the skin when it's exposed to sunlight, in combination with certain foods in the diet such as fish, eggs and fortified foods – for example cereal.
- 3** Weight bearing exercises: These are activities that put your weight through your feet and legs – for example brisk walking, running, aerobics.
- 4** Stopping smoking.
- 5** Decreasing alcohol intake.



There are other factors that may affect the likelihood of having osteoporosis, for example: being underweight; smoking; having a family history of osteoporosis or fractures; or taking medications that affect bone strength.

As part of the assessment of menopausal symptoms, your doctor can assess your risk for osteoporosis by asking you questions and conducting a basic examination. If your doctor feels that you are at a current risk of osteoporosis

they may also order some hospital tests to look specifically at your bone strength. Remember, always talk to your GP if you have any concerns about the menopause and your bone health.

In summary, bone health is an important issue to consider around the time of the menopause. It is something that can be improved through lifestyle changes and in some cases by using medication. If you want to discuss it further you can do so with your doctor.

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