

Breaking down the risk



Osteoporosis is often called the ‘silent disease’, because bone loss occurs without any symptoms. In fact, many people only become aware that there’s an issue with their bones when they break one – typically their wrist, shoulder, hip, or spine. Sometimes, the only symptom we have of a spinal fracture is that we get shorter.

However, it doesn’t have to be this way. Your doctor can assess your bone health and suggest lifestyle changes or provide treatment to help prevent fractures.

A great start to knowing more about your bone health is to use the online risk assessment tool Know your Bones.™ If it shows that you might be at risk, you should take the summary report to your GP and/or specialist for a bone health assessment.

What happens in a bone health assessment?

The first part of a bone health assessment concerns lifestyle factors that can increase the risk of osteoporosis. You’ll be asked questions about your lifestyle, and encouraged to:

- Do regular weight bearing exercise (ideally 30 minutes or more each day).
- Maintain a healthy body weight, with a BMI of between 20 and 25.
- Eat a balanced, nutritious diet, with 2-3 serves of calcium-rich foods per day.
- Limit alcohol to no more than two standard drinks per day, with two alcohol free days per week.
- Avoid or stop smoking.
- Get adequate sun exposure (5-10 minutes per day exposing face, arms and hands to sunlight) to keep your Vitamin D levels up.

The next part of the assessment will examine your risk of falling, and look at ways to prevent future falls by discussing a prevention programme.

The final part of the assessment looks at your individual risk factors that could make you more likely to develop osteoporosis and be at risk of fracture. Your doctor, nurse or Fracture Liaison will review your Know your Bones report or calculate your fracture risk using online clinical tools.

If you don’t have any risk factors (and your risk of broken bones in the future is low), then unless this changes there is nothing more to do. If your risk is moderate or high, you may be sent for a type of scan called dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) that measures your bone density. It’s simple, painless, non-invasive, and it takes about 20 minutes.

Based on the results, your doctor will let you know if you require treatment to help prevent fractures.

Know Your Bones™

Visit bones.org.nz and complete the Know Your Bones™ online bone health assessment - you’ll get a personalised report explaining your risk of fracture and recommendations for better bone health.

If you would like to assist us in helping others like yourself, please consider donating to Bone Health NZ. Visit our website www.bones.org.nz and click donate.