

Louisiana Pharmacists Association

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Louisiana Pharmacists Association Educates Patients About Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease of the bone that makes a person's bones weak and more likely to break. It is often known as a silent disease because you can't feel your bones getting weaker. About 10 million Americans have osteoporosis and another 44 million have low bone density, placing them at an increased risk to develop the disease. Studies suggest that approximately one in two women and up to one in four men age 50 and older will break a bone due to osteoporosis. A woman's risk of fracture is equal to her combined risk of breast, uterine, and ovarian cancer. A man is more likely to break a bone due to osteoporosis than he is to get prostate cancer. If you're age 50 or older and have broken a bone, talk to your doctor or other healthcare provider and ask if you should have a bone density test.

Osteoporosis occurs when the body loses too much bone, makes too little bone, or both. This causes the bones to become weak and break from a fall or, in serious cases, from sneezing or minor bumps. It is most likely to cause broken bones in the hip, spine, and wrist, as well as other bones. Broken bones can cause severe pain that may not go away. Broken or collapsed bones in the spine may cause some people to lose height. This may happen without any noticeable pain, but it may affect your posture and cause you to become stooped or hunched. This can keep some people from getting around easily and doing the things they enjoy. Twenty percent of seniors who break a hip die within one year from problems related to the broken bone itself or surgery to repair it. Many of those who survive need long-term nursing home care.

Diet, exercise, and a healthy lifestyle are keys to preventing and managing the disease. The National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends five steps to improve bone health and prevent osteoporosis and broken bones:

1. Get the calcium and vitamin D you need every day.
2. Do regular weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening exercises.
3. Don't smoke and don't drink too much alcohol.

4. Talk to your healthcare provider about your chance of getting osteoporosis and ask when you should have a bone density test.
5. Take an osteoporosis medication when it's right for you.

Although there is no cure for osteoporosis, there are steps you can take to prevent, slow or stop its progress. In some cases, you may even be able to improve bone density and reverse the disorder to some degree. Getting enough calcium and vitamin D is essential to bone health. There are also medications available to reduce the risk of broken bones. There are two categories of osteoporosis medications: antiresorptive medications that slow bone loss and anabolic drugs that increase the rate of bone formation.

Antiresorptive medications include bisphosphonates (Actonel, Atelvia, Boniva, Fosamax, and Reclast), calcitonin (Fortical and Miacalcin), denosumab (Prolia), estrogen and estrogen agonists/antagonists (Evista). They slow the bone loss that occurs in the breakdown part of the remodeling cycle. When people first start taking these medicines, they stop losing bone as quickly as before, but still make new bone at the same place. Therefore, bone density may increase. The goal of treatment with antiresorptive medicines is to prevent bone loss and lower the risk of breaking bones.

There is only one anabolic drug to rebuild bone that is approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Teriparatide (Forteo), a form of parathyroid hormone, increases the rate of bone formation. The goal of treatment with teriparatide is to build bone and lower the risk of breaking bones.

Several factors go into consideration when choosing the right medication such as your sex, age, and severity of disease. Calcitonin, estrogen and hormone therapies, and estrogen agonists/antagonists are only approved for women. Some bisphosphonates, denosumab, and teriparatide are approved for both men and women. In general, osteoporosis medicines are not recommended for premenopausal women unless they have been taking long-term steroids or other medical conditions that warrant treatment. Some medicines may be more appropriate for younger postmenopausal women while others are more appropriate for older women. Treatment options will also depend on the severity or the advancement of the disease as well as other existing medical conditions.

Patients can also prevent osteoporosis by making sure they are consuming enough calcium and vitamin D in their diets and other lifestyle changes such as doing activities outside in the sunshine. If they are consuming little to no calcium or vitamin D in their diet, then a supplement may be a good option. Patients should consult their pharmacist about finding the right supplement and dose for them to take. Patients who are already diagnosed with osteoporosis are usually taking one or more medications for other conditions. By updating your pharmacist about all the medications, supplements, and vitamins you take, you can be sure to minimize your risk of side effects and serious drug interactions. Your pharmacist can also clear up any confusion you may have about the medication you are taking in order to increase

compliance. You may not feel your bones getting stronger, but if you stop taking your medication or only take about half of the regimen, then you are putting your health at risk for breaking a bone.

Osteoporosis affects millions of Americans every year. Both men and women should talk to their healthcare provider if they are 50 or older and have broken a bone, or notice a stooped or hunched posture. Diet and exercise are helpful in preventing and managing osteoporosis. If medication is the right choice for you, it can slow or stop bone loss or rebuild bone, but it will not cure the disease. Break free from osteoporosis and protect your bone health.

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The Louisiana Pharmacists Association, established in 1882, strives to promote the interests of all pharmacists of the State of Louisiana. For more information about the LPA and its benefits, contact Julie Fuselier or Phyllis Perron, LPA Co-Executive Directors at 225/346-6883 or visit our website at www.louisianapharmacists.com.

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