

RHEUMATOLOGY

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT OSTEOPOROSIS?

This article debunks common myths surrounding osteoporosis. It also provides advice on screening and treatment methods.



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A progressive bone condition characterised by the decline in bone mass and density, osteoporosis leads to the bones getting weak and brittle. This could cause you to become more vulnerable to fractures or bone breakage. Often, a person is not aware that he or she has the condition until a fracture happens.

Osteoporosis myths

It is estimated that up to 200 million people worldwide are afflicted with this disease of brittle bones. Yet, preconceived myths about the disease prevent people from seeking treatment to reduce its risks. These include:

- **Only women need to worry about osteoporosis**

Despite being five times more common in women, 20–25% of men will experience a bone fracture caused by osteoporosis or decreased bone mass during their lifetimes. The disease typically affects men a little later in life, usually after the age of 65. Women, due to menopausal effects, tend to get it as early as their 50s.

- **Osteoporosis comes naturally with ageing**

Osteoporosis and the weakened bones it can cause are not considered part of normal ageing. Notably, while most people will experience loss of bone mass over time, it does not translate to having osteoporosis. Other contributing factors include genetics, smoking, lack of exercise, early menopause and steroid medications.

- **The young need not worry about osteoporosis**

It is never too early or late to become nutritionally aware or begin a regular exercise routine. These habits at any age will help mitigate the risk of osteoporosis. Compared to those with sedentary lifestyles, people who exercise regularly may be better poised to prevent loss of

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bone mass. Wise eating habits are another avenue of protection for the bones. For instance, calcium and vitamin D are crucial for bone health. If you are not getting enough of these via food intake or through sunlight, consult a doctor for supplements.

Osteoporosis diagnosis

Considered the gold standard, dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) is a cutting-edge technology that accurately analyses and diagnoses the condition. The scan takes less than 15 minutes. A person is considered as having osteoporosis when his or her bone mineral density (BMD) turns out less than or equal to 2.5 standard deviations, lower than that of a healthy 30- to 40-year-old.

Osteoporosis treatment

Two methods are primarily used to treat osteoporosis:

- **Anti-resorptive**

Medications such as selective oestrogen receptor modulators, bisphosphonates and the newer treatments targeting RANK ligand are prescribed to slow down the rate of bone resorption. This then slows down the rate of bone loss.

- **Anabolic**

This method is geared towards increasing bone mass with medication to escalate the rate of bone formation and lower the risk of fractures. An example of this is teriparatide injections.