



## Osteoporosis: the Silent Thief

By Merilla Hopkins, Lincoln Hospital Pharmacist



Every 20 seconds, osteoporosis causes a fracture.

Osteoporosis has been dubbed the “silent thief” because this disease begins depleting bone density virtually undetected until they have been so stripped of their mineral stores that fractures occur. Osteoporosis is typically a women’s disease, however men can be affected as well. The most common sites of bone weakening include the vertebrae, hips, heels and forearms near the wrists. Fractures here are painful and slow to heal.

Despite the bad news, osteoporosis is preventable and detection is the key to prevention.

Although genetics do play a major role in the onset of osteoporosis, simple life-style changes can reduce risk factors.

- Stop smoking, as smoking decreases natural estrogen stores and has a direct toxic effect on bone cells.
- Stop excessive alcohol use. Alcohol decreases bone formation and consumption increases your risk of falling.
- Limit caffeine intake – especially colas and coffee. Caffeine hinders the absorption of calcium.
- Start an exercise program, as weight-bearing exercise decreases the rate of bone loss.
- Talk to your doctor about calcium rich foods or possibly a calcium supplement.

Just as blood pressure or cholesterol tests are used to predict heart attack and stroke, bone density testing can be used to predict bone mass loss. Wouldn’t you like to know if you are at risk?

Risk factors include petite or small frame, life-long low calcium intake, alcoholism, advanced age, inadequate physical activity, Asian or Caucasian descent, early menopause, general poor health, prolonged hormone replacement therapy, too much thyroid hormone or prolonged steroid use (usually for asthma).

Women ages 30 to 49 should consider an initial bone density screening to set a reference, or baseline, for future tests. You should be tested again at menopause, if not before, to check if there has been any bone mass depletion. If your density test shows your bone mass as normal, you should repeat the test in three to five years. If your test shows you are losing bone mass, continued testing on a two to three year cycle should be done.

**Lincoln Hospital has a DEXA-Scan machine**, the most reliable test for bone density. It uses an extremely low dose of radiation, is painless and gives physicians the clearest picture of your bone health. If you’re interested in having a DEXA-Scan, talk to your physician. If your doctor is from out of town and they don’t know Lincoln Hospital has a DEXA-Scan, just tell them you want your testing done here. We’ll send them the results ASAP.