

# Osteoporosis: Risks & Prevention

**Michelle Montgomery, PTA**  
**Physical Therapist Assistant**  
**Andover Physical Therapy**

Osteoporosis is the loss of bone mass causing bones to become fragile and more susceptible to fractures. These fractures occur most often at the wrist, spine, and hip. Although osteoporosis primarily affects women over the age of 50, it can strike at any age and to any gender or ethnic background.

Risk factors that can increase the likelihood of developing the disease include a family history of osteoporosis, being female, having a thin or small frame, age, post menopause, a diet low in calcium, inactivity, anorexia nervosa, cigarette smoking and excessive use of alcohol. Even though some risk factors are out of our control, there are choices we can make in life to help build and preserve bone mass as well as help prevent osteoporosis.

A combination of exercises, good posture, a diet rich in calcium and Vitamin D, and a healthy lifestyle all contribute to the prevention of osteoporosis. Building strong bones during childhood and adolescence can be the best defense. Getting plenty of calcium while your bones are growing helps to increase your body's bone mass. Exercise increases muscular support to bones as well as keeps your joints and muscles flexible. If you have osteoporosis, or are at high risk for it, you should consult your physician or physical therapist to develop a therapeutic exercise program that is appropriate for you.

If you are younger, you can take measures to prevent bone loss, and if you are older there are tests that can detect the disease and treatments to help you live an active and comfortable lifestyle. Osteoporosis can be serious and debilitating, but the good news is that it is never too late to do something about it.