

When to check?

According to Osteoporosis Canada's 2010 clinical practice guidelines, screening for osteoporosis and risk for fracture generally begins at age 65 to identify men at high risk. However, certain people are at a higher risk of developing osteoporosis and may be screened at an earlier age to prevent injury or fracture. Risk factors include:

- Previous fracture(s)
- Chronic inflammatory conditions, e.g. Crohn's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, etc.
- Certain diseases and disorders that disrupt nutrient absorption, e.g. Celiac disease, anorexia, etc.
- Medical conditions that interfere with bone density e.g. hyperparathyroidism, hypogonadism, etc.
- Continuous use of certain drugs: anticonvulsants, heparin, glucocorticoid therapy, etc.
- Low dietary calcium intake and/or vitamin D deficiency

Speak to your doctor to know if early screening is appropriate for you.

What kind of screening is this?

The tests administered to detect osteoporosis are called Bone Mineral Density (BMD) tests. These tests measure bone density in an accurate yet painless way. A BMD test can tell you if you have osteoporosis and estimate your risk of developing it in the future. Densitometers are the machines used to perform BMD tests. The most common type of BMD test used to screen for osteoporosis is called dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA). During this test you are asked to lie down on a table while a small x-ray detector scans your body. This scan emits a small amount of radiation (in the form of light) which will be measured as it passes through the bone. With this measurement, a radiologist (x-ray specialist) can determine how thick or thin (dense) your bones are. Your doctor may also perform an assessment for 10-year fracture risk. This assessment classifies individuals as having low, moderate, or high 10-year fracture risk as determined by age, sex, and the BMD test. When doing this assessment, your doctor will also consider specific risk factors such as your fracture history, family health history and glucocorticoid use and will re-classify your fracture risk accordingly.

Why?

Almost 4% of Canadian men age 50 and up have osteoporosis and approximately 1 in 5 men will have an osteoporosis-related fracture. This disease causes progressive weakening of the bone, which can lead to bone fragility and a higher incidence of fractures especially in the larger joints such as hips and knees. Having osteoporosis may also greatly decrease quality of life by causing chronic pain, disfigurement, low self-esteem, limited mobility and increasing social dependence. Knowing your risk factors and taking appropriate action, as well as being screened at regular intervals, may lead to early detection of osteoporosis or possibly prevent it all together.

What to tell your doctor:

1. Family or personal history of osteoporosis or major/minor fractures
2. List any pre-existing health conditions that disrupt nutrient absorption or bone density, e.g. Celiac or Crohn's disease, thyroid disease, etc.
3. List all medications, vitamins supplements and natural products, especially anticonvulsants, heparin, or glucocorticoid therapy.
4. Lifestyle factors, especially alcohol, caffeine, calcium and vitamin D intake