Bone Up on Osteoporosis

As you age, your bones may become more likely to fracture. Get the facts about your risk and the best way to prevent this disease.

If you have one or more of the following risk factors, talk to your doctor about your health history to be sure you get screenings when they will be of the most help to you.

**Age.** Your risk for osteoporosis increases with age. One in three women over age 50 suffer from fractures, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

**Gender.** Women account for 8 million of the 10 million Americans who have osteoporosis. Changes during menopause make women lose bone more rapidly.

**Race.** White and Asian women are most likely to develop osteoporosis.

**Bone Structure and weight.** Women with small frames are at greater risk. Women under 130 pounds also have an increased chance of developing the disease.

**Menstrual history.** Early menopause increases risk. Women who stop menstruating because of anorexia, bulimia or excessive exercise share the risk.

**Lifestyle.** Smoking, drinking alcohol, taking in too little calcium or avoiding weight-bearing exercise can all increase your chances of developing osteoporosis.

**Medications.** Anticonvulsants, certain types of antacids, some cholesterol-lowering medications and blood thinners may damage bone tissue.

**Hormones.** Excessive thyroid hormones or gonadotropin-releasing hormones used for the treatment of endometriosis may have negative effects on bone tissue.

To continue building new bone tissue as you age, the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases recommends taking these steps.

**Get enough calcium.** Many published studies show that low calcium intake appears to be associated with low bone mass, rapid bone loss and high fracture rates. The National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends 1,000 mg of calcium daily for adults under 50 and 1,200 mg daily for those over 50. Try to eat foods rich in calcium, such as low-fat dairy products, broccoli, collard greens, tofu, almonds, sardines and salmon. Supplements can also help you reach the daily recommendation.

**Add vitamin D.** To help your body absorb calcium, experts recommend taking 800 to 1,000 IU daily if you are over age 50.

**Stay active.** Like muscle, bone is living tissue that responds to weight-bearing exercise by becoming stronger.

**Stop smoking.** Cigarette smoking is bad for your bones as well as for your heart and lungs. Smokers also may absorb less calcium from their diets.

**Put down the alcohol.** Women and men who drink heavily are more prone to bone loss and fractures.