What You Need to Know about OSTEOPOROSIS?

Are You at Risk? What to Ask Your Doctor

This month is National Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention Month. Most likely you have heard about osteoporosis. Some people may think that it’s a disease related only to elderly people. However, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF), the process of bone loss that leads to osteoporosis can begin developing when you are in your 30’s! And, it’s important to know that with certain lifestyle changes, you may help to prevent it.

What is Osteoporosis?

The NOF explains that osteoporosis is a disease of the bones. As people grow older, bones lose density and may become brittle and weak. Decreased bone mass and weakened bones are more prone to breaks or fractures. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, over 1.5 million people experience a bone fracture due to osteoporosis every year.

Who is at Risk for Osteoporosis?

Over 80% of Americans with osteoporosis are women. With the decline of the female hormone estrogen at menopause, usually around age 50, bone breakdown may significantly increase. The NOF reports that women may lose up to 20% of bone mass after menopause, putting them at higher risk for the disease.

Are There Other Risk Factors?

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) lists other risk factors for osteoporosis:

- **Age** – Osteoporosis is a major health concern for women over age 60
- **Race** – Caucasian and Asian women are at higher risk
- **Physical Build** - Thin, small-boned women have less bone density
- **Family History** – Bone density is often determined by heredity
- **Smoking** – Tobacco use increases bone loss after menopause
- **Lack of Exercise** - Being sedentary can contribute to bone loss
- **Alcohol** – Excess alcohol use can interfere with bone growth
- **Diet** – A diet poor in essential vitamins and minerals affects bone health
How is it Diagnosed? What are the Symptoms?

According to the NOF, osteoporosis is often called a “silent” disease because there may be no symptoms until you break a bone. But if there are no symptoms, how is osteoporosis diagnosed?

The NIH recommends that women who are 60 or older, or have had a fracture, talk to their doctors about screening tests for osteoporosis. Bone density screening (a special X-ray) can help you and your doctor determine your risk for the disease. Osteoporosis screening tests can also allow you to take steps now that may help prevent the condition from developing, or getting worse. Your doctor can advise you when screening may be appropriate for you.

How Can I Help to Prevent Osteoporosis?

The NIH offers the following recommendations to help prevent osteoporosis:

• **Eat a Healthy, Well-balanced Diet.** Eating a diet that contains a variety of vitamins, minerals, and other important nutrients helps keep our bodies healthy. In particular, calcium and vitamin D are needed for strong bones and to assist the heart, muscles, and nerves to function properly. The NIH advises limiting the amount of caffeine in your diet.

• **Exercise Regularly.** Like muscle, bone is living tissue that responds to exercise by becoming stronger. The best exercises for your bones are weight-bearing exercises such as walking, hiking, jogging, stair-climbing, weight training, tennis, and dancing. Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that can benefit you and help strengthen your bones.

• **Stop Smoking.** Tobacco use is unhealthy for your bones as well as for your heart and lungs. Women who smoke have lower levels of estrogen compared to nonsmokers and may experience menopause earlier. Smokers also may absorb less calcium from their diets.

• **Avoid Alcohol.** Excess use of alcohol may be damaging to the bones, even in young women and men. Those who drink heavily are more prone to bone loss and fractures and an increased risk of falling.

• **Talk to Your Doctor about Medications that Can Cause Bone Loss.** The long-term use of certain medications can affect bone density. It is important to discuss the use of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs with your doctor.

An Important Fact to Remember: **Osteoporosis is Usually Preventable and Treatable!**

Being aware of the risks and changing your health behaviors may help you to prevent or decrease the severity of osteoporosis later in life. Physicians and their patients now have more treatment options than ever before. If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis, your doctor can recommend medications and exercises to prevent further bone loss and improve bone density. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved (and is researching additional) drugs that preserve or increase bone mass and maintain bone quality in order to help reduce the risk of fractures. Talk to your doctor about your risks and screening options. Protect your bones - start today!

For More Information….

The National Osteoporosis Foundation

www.nof.org  202-223-2226

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institutes of Health Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases ~ National Resource Center

Surgeon's General Report on Bone Health and Osteoporosis

http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/bonehealth/

http://www.osteo.org/  1-800-624-BONE (2663)
Checking for Changes in Your Skin: What You Should Know About Skin Cancer

Summer will be here soon and we all look forward to fun outdoor activities. However, there is a potential danger lurking behind those enjoyable pool parties and picnics at the beach – sun overexposure that can lead to skin cancer. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in this country. The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) estimates that more than one million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the U.S. in 2007.

What Is Skin Cancer?

The American Cancer Society (ACS) explains that skin cancer begins in cells, the building blocks that make up the skin. Normally, skin cells grow and divide to form new cells. Every day skin cells grow old and die, and new cells take their place.

Sometimes, this orderly process goes awry. New cells form when the skin does not need them, and old cells do not die when they should. These extra cells can form a mass of tissue called a growth or tumor. Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays appears to be the most important factor involved in the development of skin cancer.

What are the Most Common Types of Skin Cancer?

Skin cancers are named for the types of cells that become cancerous. According to the AAD, the most common types of skin cancers are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. These cancers usually form on the head, face, neck, hands, and arms - areas that are most often exposed to the sun. However, skin cancer can occur anywhere.

- **Basal cell carcinoma** grows slowly. It usually develops on areas of the skin that have been exposed to the sun. It is most common on the face. Basal cell cancer rarely spreads to other parts of the body.
- **Squamous cell carcinoma** also develops on parts of the skin that have been exposed to the sun. However, it can also grow in places that are not usually exposed to the sun. Squamous cell cancer may spread to lymph nodes and organs inside the body.
- **Melanoma** can develop anywhere on the skin, often from a mole, or it may grow inside the body. Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer and can be fatal if allowed to progress and spread. According to the AAD, melanoma is the sixth most common cancer in women and the second most common cancer in women age 20-29. More than 75 percent of all skin cancer deaths in the U.S. are due to melanoma.

Risk Factors for Skin Cancer

People with certain risk factors may be more likely than others to develop skin cancer. Risk factors vary for different types of skin cancer, but the CDC lists common risk factors for all types of skin cancer:

- Light natural skin color
- Family history of skin cancer
• Personal history of skin cancer
• Exposure to the sun through work and/or play
• A history of sunburns early in life
• Skin that burns, freckles, reddens easily, or becomes painful in the sun
• Blue or green eyes
• Blond or red hair
• Certain types of moles and/or a large number of moles

**Symptoms of Skin Cancer**

Sometimes skin cancer may cause irritation, but usually it does not. According to the NCI, a change on the skin is the most common sign of skin cancer. It may be a new growth, a sore that does not heal, or a change in a mole. Not all skin cancers look the same. Skin changes to watch for include:

• Small, smooth, shiny, pale, or waxy lump
• New mole
• Firm, red lump
• Sore or lump that bleeds or develops a crust or a scab
• Flat red spot that is rough, dry, or scaly and may become itchy or tender
• Red or brown patch that is rough and scaly
• Change in the size, shape, color, or feel of a mole

The ACS recommends following the simple **ABCD** rule to help you when checking your skin moles, freckles, and birthmarks.

**A- Asymmetry** - half of a mole does not match the other. Most early melanomas are asymmetrical.

**B- Border** - the border, or edges, of a mole are blurred, notched, or irregular. The borders of early melanomas are often uneven and may have scalloped edges.

**C- Color** - the color of a mole is not the same all over. It may have different shades of one color or have patches of red or white. Varied shades of brown, tan, or black are often the first sign of melanoma.

**D- Diameter** - a mole is ¼ inch or larger (equal to a pencil eraser). Early melanomas tend to grow larger than common moles.

Photos of examples of skin cancer may be seen on the NCI website at: http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/wyntk/skin/page6

**Testing for Skin Cancer**

If you have a change on the skin, the NCI urges you to see your doctor or a dermatologist (skin specialist) who can determine whether the change is due to cancer or to some other cause. The doctor may remove skin tissue from all or part of the area that does not look normal. This is called a “biopsy” and is usually done under a local anesthetic. The tissue sample is sent to a lab to be checked under a microscope. A biopsy is the best way to diagnose skin cancer.
Is Skin Cancer Curable?

According to the CDC, the two most common types of skin cancer—basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas—are 95% curable if detected and treated early. However, melanoma is more dangerous, especially among young people. Approximately, 65%-90% of melanomas are caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light or sunlight. That is why it is so important to protect your skin when you are in the sun.

Protecting Yourself and Your Family

According to the ACS, the best way to protect your family from skin cancer is to avoid prolonged exposure to the sun. In a survey sponsored by the CDC, 43% of white children under age 12 have been sunburned at least one time during the past year. When used consistently, sun-protective practices may help reduce the risk of sunburns and skin cancer. The following CDC recommendations are intended for people of all ages, including babies and children:

- Seek shade, especially during midday hours (10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.), when UV rays are strongest and do the most damage.
- Cover up with clothing to protect exposed skin.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to shade the face, head, ears, and neck.
- Put on sunglasses that wrap around and block close to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays as possible.
- Rub on sunscreen with a sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher, and both UVA and UVB protection.

In addition, the CDC also cautions against using tanning booths and sunlamps. UV rays from artificial sources, such as sun lamps and tanning beds are just as dangerous and damaging as those from the sun.

Early Detection Is the Key

The ACS reminds us that the earlier skin cancer is detected, the greater the chance that it may be cured. Remember to:

- Check for skin changes regularly and follow the ABCD rule. The best time to do this exam is after a shower or bath. You should check your skin in a room with plenty of light. You should use a full-length mirror and a hand-held mirror. It’s best to begin by learning where your birthmarks, moles, and other marks are and their usual look and feel.
- Protect your skin from the harmful rays of the sun.
- Make an appointment with your doctor if you notice any changes or have a concern.

For more information about sun protection for your family, read the “Parent Guide to Protecting Children from Skin Cancer” at [http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/chooseyourcover/guide.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/chooseyourcover/guide.htm)
More Than “Just a Phase?”
Recognizing and Getting Help for Teen Depression

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) reports that only in the past two decades has depression in adolescents and teens been taken seriously. Yet, like adults, teens can have mental health disorders that interfere with the way they think, feel and act. Because normal behaviors vary from one childhood stage to another, it can be difficult to tell whether a teen is just going through a temporary “phase” or is suffering from depression.

What is the Impact?

Depression is one of several mental health disorders that can affect teens. The NIMH advises that when untreated, mental health disorders may lead to school failure, family conflicts, drug abuse, violence, and even suicide. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), studies show that as many as one in five adolescents and teens may have a mental health disorder. An NIMH study estimated that the prevalence of depression in 9 to 17 year-olds surveyed within a 6-month period was 6%, with nearly 5% having major depression.

In addition, depression in teens may be associated with increased risk of suicidal behaviors. NIMH-supported researchers found that among teens who develop major depressive disorder, as many as 7% may commit suicide in their young adult years.

Recognizing the Signs of Teen Depression

It is important to recognize that depression is a serious illness. The following information from the NIMH and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) advises parents how to recognize signs of teen depression and how to get help. Here are some signs to watch for:

- Frequent sadness, fearfulness, crying
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness
- Decreased interest in activities, or inability to enjoy favorite activities
- Persistent boredom, low energy
- Social isolation, poor communication
- Low self-esteem and guilt
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability, anger or hostility
- Difficulty with relationships
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses, such as headaches and stomachaches
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance at school
- Poor concentration
- A major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Talk of, or efforts to, run away from home
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior
What to Do If You Think Your Teen May Be Depressed

According to the NIMH, the first step in getting help for teen depression is to make an appointment for your teen with his/her pediatrician or family doctor. A complete exam can help to rule out any physical causes. Your teen’s doctor may suggest an evaluation by a mental health professional that specializes in the treatment of adolescents and teenagers.

How is Teen Depression Treated?

The AACAP advises that a mental health professional can recommend treatment that may be right for your son or daughter. Various treatment options are available, including individual and family counseling, therapy, and medication.

Don’t Wait to See If It Gets Better

SAMSHA warns us that teens with mental health issues need to get help as soon as possible. If you are worried about how your teen’s behavior has changed, or if a teacher or friend has mentioned that your teen “doesn’t seem to be himself or herself,” schedule an evaluation with your teen’s doctor as soon as possible.

Yoga - The Ultimate Balancing Act

If you are looking for a work out program that is easy to learn, requires little or no equipment and may help to relax you, yoga may be right for you. According to the American Yoga Association (AYA), the practice of yoga dates back more than 5,000 years. Yoga is practiced around the world for its psychological, physical, and spiritual benefits. Americans have practiced it for at least 150 years, but it grew in popularity during the 1960s. According to a Harvard Medical School study of complementary and alternative medicine, over 10 million adults in the United States currently practice yoga.

What is Yoga?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines yoga as a combination of breathing exercises, physical postures, and meditation that may help to calm the nervous system and balance body, mind, and spirit. In the past, yoga has been associated with Hinduism; however, it is not a religion nor does it require those who practice yoga to follow any particular creeds or beliefs.

The AYA states that there are over a hundred different forms of yoga. Hatha yoga is the most commonly practiced in the U.S. and is the form that most people associate with yoga practice. Hatha yoga involves physical movements, poses (known as asanas), and breathing techniques.

The Nemours Foundation lists the most common types of hatha yoga:

- Gentle yoga – slow stretches and deep breathing to improve flexibility
- Iyengar yoga – precise poses using equipment such as blocks, ropes and chairs
• *Ashtanga yoga* – fast-paced movements and deep breathing aimed at building strength, stamina, and concentration
• *Bikram yoga* – a series of stretches and poses practiced in rooms heated to more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit
• *Kundalini yoga* – poses, breathing techniques, chanting, and meditation

**What are the Possible Benefits of Yoga?**

According to the AYA, yoga’s balancing poses and movements may help increase strength and flexibility, improve coordination, and enhance concentration. Studies have shown that it may also help to reduce stress and improve concentration.

The Mayo Clinic lists other potential health benefits. Yoga may help to:

- Lose and control weight.
- Improve balance.
- Reduce the severity of hot flashes that some women experience during menopause.
- Reduce the pain and improve the hand strength of patients with carpal tunnel syndrome, a nerve disorder of the hand caused by repetitive motion.
- Enhance management of chronic conditions, such as asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease, depression, and osteoarthritis.
- Help with cancer coping techniques - yoga practiced regularly by those with cancer may improve sleep and their quality of life.
- Relieve caregiver stress and fatigue – yoga may help people caring for those with cancer or Alzheimer’s disease by enhancing their ability to cope and manage stress.

**Who Can Practice Yoga?**

The CDC explains that gentle forms of yoga may be suitable for most adults of any age or physical condition. However, some forms of yoga may be too strenuous for those with certain medical problems, such as back or neck pain or joint problems. The Mayo Clinic recommends talking to your doctor before starting yoga, especially if you have any of the following health conditions:

- Eye condition(s), including glaucoma
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Osteoporosis
- Risk of blood clots
- Pregnancy

Yoga is considered safe during pregnancy and when you are nursing. However, during pregnancy, the Mayo Clinic suggests avoiding poses that twist at the waist or put pressure on your uterus. To find out if yoga is okay for you during your pregnancy, talk to your doctor. To find a prenatal yoga class, check your local hospital or yoga studio.
How Do I Get Started?

Thanks to its popularity, there are several options for learning yoga. There are how-to books, videos, and group and individual classes. To find a yoga class in your area, check out your local adult education programs, YMCA, yoga studios, or fitness centers. *(Always talk to your doctor before beginning yoga or any exercise program).* The Mayo Clinic suggests asking the following questions before you sign up for a yoga class:

- Is the class suitable for beginners?
- What are the yoga teacher’s qualifications?
- Does the teacher have experience working with students at your fitness level?
- What will you need to bring to the class? Yoga mats are the most commonly used equipment in yoga classes. Many places that offer yoga provide mats for their students to use during class.

If you are new to yoga, the AYA recommends that you start slowly. Before taking a class, find out what style the teacher practices. Tell the teacher that this is your first time and you may need some assistance. Pay attention to how you feel while you are doing a pose during yoga class. If you feel any discomfort, stop. Instead, practice slow, deep breathing until the teacher begins another pose that is more suitable for you. Your teacher may suggest ways to modify the pose for your fitness level or any special needs you may have.

Remember that yoga is considered a process, not an exercise - learn the basic poses and build from there. Practicing yoga regularly may increase your flexibility, improve your balance, and calm your mind, and it may help you strive to achieve your goal of better health. Your body and your mind will thank you for it.
Smoking Facts

*Did you know…..* There are many good reasons why you should quit smoking. You’re probably familiar with the dangers of smoking such as increased risk of lung cancer, heart disease, and stroke. Here are some more facts about smoking and your health:

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smokers are more likely to be absent from work than nonsmokers, and their illnesses last longer. Smokers tend to incur more medical costs, to see physicians more frequently and are admitted to hospitals more often and for longer periods than nonsmokers.
- People who smoke may be more likely to die during middle age than people who never smoked or those who gave up the habit, according to a 2006 study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine.
- The U.S. Surgeon General’s report on smoking states that tobacco use is linked to the following types of cancers: bladder, cervical, esophageal, kidney, laryngeal (throat), leukemia, lung, oral, pancreatic and stomach.
- The same report advised that smokers are at higher risk for strokes and heart attacks. The use of tobacco-related products weakens the walls of the body’s main blood vessels and arteries -- specifically those of the brain and the heart. Smokers under age 40 are four to five times more likely to have a heart attack as people in that age group who do not smoke.

The American Cancer Society encourages you to make a positive change in your health by quitting smoking now.

*Sources: CDC, US Surgeon General’s Report, American Cancer Society*

For information to help you quit smoking, please visit the following website: [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov), or call the National Network of Tobacco Cessation Quitlines at 1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669) TTY 1-800-332-8615.
Pregnancy Pointers:
What is Cesarean Birth?

Cesarean birth is a surgical method of delivering a baby that involves making an incision through a woman’s abdomen and uterine muscle, and removing the baby. While it can be a lifesaver for mother and/or child, a Cesarean birth may cause for anxiety if you lack information or have not been prepared for this type of delivery.

Reasons for Cesarean Birth

Cesareans, or C-sections, are performed whenever it appears that a vaginal delivery cannot be completed safely or when your baby’s immediate birth is necessary. Your doctor may decide well before labor begins that a change in the medical condition of you or your baby will require intervention. For example, you may have severe diabetes or your baby may be too large to pass through the pelvic bones. In such cases, you and your doctor may decide on an appropriate date and schedule a Cesarean delivery for that day.

Sometimes, however, your doctor will not know until after your labor has begun that a change in your or your baby’s medical condition requires intervention. If the baby experiences sudden distress or if your labor fails to progress, for example, a Cesarean may be appropriate.

Preparing for Cesarean Birth

When your Cesarean is anticipated, you will have the opportunity to discuss it thoroughly with your doctor, just as you would any other surgery. You will have time to participate in any classes your hospital might have to offer and to plan for your recovery. Since hospital policies vary, be sure to ask whether your partner will be allowed in the operating room with you. If you know the date of your “planned” Cesarean, you may wish to organize your household ahead of time. You will have a longer recovery period after a Cesarean birth, so it will be helpful to plan ahead for assistance with meals, childcare, and household chores. Since all Cesareans are not anticipated, you may want to discuss Cesarean procedures with your doctor during one of your regular visits as well as with your childbirth educator.

Source: American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology

BCBSGA announces Future Moms, a prenatal education program designed to help you have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. Please call 800-814-1508 for more information.
Please consult your doctor for advice about changes that may affect your health. Trade names of commonly used medications and devices are provided for ease of education but are not intended as particular endorsements. Your doctor may choose to use items not represented here. Some services may not be covered under your health plan. Please refer to your Health Plan Group Certificate and Schedule of Benefits for details concerning benefits, procedures, and exclusions. This newsletter and your health plan company are not affiliated with or responsible for information provided by resources cited in the articles.