

Osteoporotic Bone



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**Osteoporosis**  
Patient Advice and Education



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# Osteoporosis

## “The Silent Epidemic”

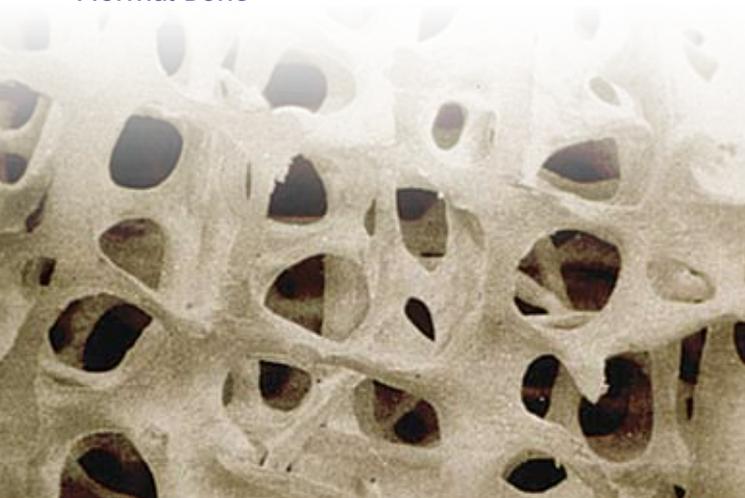
### What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a generalised disorder of the skeleton, where bone strength is compromised as a result of reduced bone quality and low bone density. The consequent structural weakness leads to an increase in bone fragility and risk of fractures (broken bones).

### How do I know if I have osteoporosis?

Regrettably, osteoporosis is too frequently left undetected until fracture occurs as there are no other symptoms – which is why osteoporosis is sometimes known as the “silent epidemic”. However, there are clues which help to identify those at increased risk of osteoporosis and susceptible to fracture.

### Normal Bone



### What are the clues?

These include the following:

- An earlier fracture sustained on low trauma (defined as a fall from standing or sitting)
- A first-degree family history of fractures, i.e. in mother, father, sister or brother, (especially at the hip, wrist and spine)
- Women with premature menopause (aged 45 or younger)
- Smoking
- Drinking more than 3 units of alcohol a day
- A low body weight – known as body mass index (BMI) – of 18 or lower
- Limited weight bearing activity
- Poor diet
- Reduced exposure to sunlight (which manufactures vitamin D in the skin)
- The use of certain treatments, particularly steroids, “cortisone” (usually prednisolone), anticonvulsants and occasionally the blood-thinning drug heparin
- The presence of a range of other disorders including rheumatoid arthritis, colitis, an overactive thyroid, coeliac disease, chronic liver or kidney disease

### What should I do if I am concerned about the possibility of osteoporosis?

Speak to your general practitioner, who will discuss your individual risk with the knowledge of your personal and family medical history. You can also contact the specialist unit at London Medical, arrange to see one of the nurses or consultants and have a full osteoporosis risk-assessment performed, which involves completing a detailed questionnaire and undergoing a simple physical examination.

### If I am at risk, can osteoporosis be confirmed?

Yes, the best diagnostic method is bone densitometry. This sophisticated, but non-invasive test measures bone density (strength) usually by scanning the hip and spine. The radiation dose is extremely low and this is a very safe test (see separate leaflet on bone density scanning). It is important that the results are interpreted by an expert and are taken in conjunction with your individual risk factors.

### If osteoporosis is diagnosed can it be treated?

Unreservedly, the answer is YES. Osteoporosis can be managed by ensuring all appropriate lifestyle measures are corrected and using medication when appropriate. There is an increasing range of effective treatments, which can be taken in tablet form or given by injections – under the skin or into a vein. The frequency of treatment varies from daily to annually.

### Are any other tests required?

There are occasions when the cause of osteoporosis is unclear, so blood tests are carried out to seek any underlying explanation, which frequently can be corrected or treated. In addition, special blood tests indicate the rate of bone turnover, which can be increased in osteoporosis. These markers of bone remodelling also help in the early monitoring of response to treatment. Occasionally, X-rays of the spine are required since in most instances where vertebrae (back bones) are crushed or deformed from osteoporosis, the finding of any abnormality would influence decisions about treatment.

### What should I do now?

At London Medical, we provide a comprehensive clinical consultant-run diagnostic, treatment and backup service. This includes a “one-stop approach” when assessments, bone density scanning, additional investigations, consultation and treatment can be carried out at a single visit.