

Get a handle on how to  
prevent and treat low bone mass

# Osteoporosis

FOR  
**DUMMIES**<sup>®</sup>



**Carolyn Riester  
O'Connor, MD**

*Chief of Rheumatology and  
Associate Professor of Medicine,  
Drexel University College of Medicine*

**Sharon Perkins, RN**

***A Reference for the Rest of Us!***<sup>®</sup>

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# ***Osteoporosis For Dummies<sup>®</sup>***

**by Carolyn Riester O'Connor, MD and Sharon  
Perkins, RN**



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# Osteoporosis For Dummies®

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# About the Authors

**Carolyn O'Connor** graduated *cum laude* from Yale College with a bachelor of science degree in chemistry. She then traveled to Manhattan to attend Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons. After medical school, she did her postgraduate training in internal medicine at The New York Hospital – Cornell Medical School. Her fellowship training in rheumatology was at Boston University Medical Center. Currently, she is chief of rheumatology and associate professor of medicine at Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia. One of her major interests is metabolic bone disease. Her division of rheumatology runs the bone density program at Drexel.

She has two children; one has majored in philosophy and the other is studying mechanical engineering. Her outside interests include growing roses and struggling with the *New York Times* Crossword.

**Sharon Perkins** has been a registered nurse for almost 20 years, and currently works for a group of retinal doctors. Since she started treating an older population with macular degeneration, she sees way more osteoporosis than she wishes she did. She has five children and two daughters-in-law, two grandchildren, and a husband who recently retired from 20-plus years of flying airplanes and is currently hanging around the house.

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# Dedications

I dedicate this book to my many patients who trust in my advice. Truly, from listening to them and caring for them, I have learned more about osteoporosis than from reading any textbook.

*Carolyn R. O'Connor, MD*

For my granddaughter Emma, in hopes that osteoporosis will be fully preventable in her future.

*Sharon Perkins*

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# Authors' Acknowledgments

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- \* Susan Ott, MD, who supplied pathologic slides of bone disorders

*Carolyn R. O'Connor, MD*

One of my earliest memories is of my great grandmother, who my younger sister called “the grandma with the broken arm.” I’d just met my family history of osteoporosis, although I didn’t know it at the time.

Years down the road, my children remembered *their* great grandmother, daughter of my great grandma, who had fallen and broken her hip. Pictures show the inches she lost as she aged as evidence of vertebral compression fractures.

Osteoporosis runs in my family, but we never really put a name to it or did much about it. But because of the problems my relatives had, I was always aware of aging as being dangerous for your bones, and for that, I thank them.

I also have to thank my sister, Sue, for telling me I’d hate writing a book on osteoporosis because “bones are boring.” She knows I love a challenge.

Thanks to all the rest of my family and my friends for occasionally remembering that I was writing a book and asking me how it was going. Sometimes I needed a chance to vent.

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# Introduction

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You may think you know enough about osteoporosis without reading a whole book on it. Take calcium, try not to fall down the basement steps, be prepared to shrink three or four inches as you get older, and so on, right? What else is there to know? Plenty, as we hope you'll agree after reading this book. The unfortunate fact is that although nobody wants to have osteoporosis, not enough people take steps to decrease their chances of developing it.

Considering that your odds of developing osteoporosis in the United States today are around 40 percent if you're female and 10 percent if you're male, many people are leaving the fate of their bones to chance.

One of our goals in writing this book is to keep you from developing osteoporosis. However, if you already have osteoporosis, our goal is to minimize the damage it does to your bones, through medication, healthy eating, and exercise.

If you've already fallen and broken bones, we want to help you avoid another fall. If you have children or grandchildren, we hope that you'll nag them into taking steps to avoid falling into osteoporosis themselves. We want to help you have healthy bones. We also want you to avoid spending months in casts or in surgery after falls that break bones you really need to stay mobile.

You can prevent osteoporosis or at least reduce its severity, but it takes lifestyle changes that start in childhood. Is making the lifestyle changes worth it? Ask anyone who's spent six months recovering from a broken hip. Does it take discipline? Yes — but so does learning to walk again.

Nothing in life is simple, but our goal is to educate you as painlessly as possible to the high cost of osteoporosis, and the newest ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat it. Don't fall into the trap of believing that osteoporosis is inevitable; we're here to help you avoid the bad breaks.

## About This Book

We wrote this book hoping it would be less of a "how to" book and more of a "how to avoid" book. In other words, rather than just explain how to deal with osteoporosis, we

also want to show how to avoid it altogether.

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Unfortunately, for some of you, that's not going to be possible. Some of you already have osteoporosis, and others are inevitably going to have it. For you, we wrote quite a bit of (we hope) helpful information on what medications to take, how to handle a fracture, and how to improve your bone strength.

Osteoporosis is, to a large degree, preventable, but it takes years of planning to prevent it. Although it may be too late to prevent osteoporosis for some of you, others have time — time to educate yourselves, your families, and your friends about building bone that can stand up to the test of time without crumbling.

This book is intended to help you do just that. We wrote it with the personal background of family history of osteoporotic fractures and years of treating patients with osteoporosis. Remember that we didn't write this book to be read all the way through. If you don't have time or if you only want to know about a specific topic, you can go to the section that answers your questions and understand it, without having to read everything that comes before.

However, starting at the beginning may be best for you if you want to know exactly what osteoporosis is. The textbooks say that osteoporosis is “a disease of bony fragility, characterized by low bone mass,” but that doesn't really begin to explain the changes your bones undergo when they become osteoporotic. And it certainly doesn't describe the chaos that fragile bones can bring to your life.

## Conventions Used in This Book

In this book we use the following conventions to help make everything consistent and easier to understand.

- ✓ All Web addresses appear in `monofont`.
- ✓ **Bold** text indicates keywords in bulleted lists or highlights the action parts of numbered steps.
- ✓ *Italics* identify new terms, followed by an easy-to-understand definition.

## What You're Not to Read

Of course we want you to read everything in this book. However, we understand that you may only want to read the essentials. So in this section we identify the “skippable” material if you’re in such a hurry that you can’t read everything. The following items are interesting to read, but not essential for you to understand and cope with osteoporosis

- ✓ **Text in sidebars:** The sidebars are shaded boxes that appear throughout the book. They sometimes share fun facts, but nothing that’s vital to your understanding of osteoporosis.
- ✓ **Anything with a Technical Stuff icon attached:** This information is interesting, but you won’t break a bone if you skip it.
- ✓ **The stuff on the copyright page:** Although the Library of Congress may find this text fascinating, we doubt you’ll find anything that’s enthralling in the legal language. Feel free to pass over it.

## Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, we make a few assumptions about you, our dear reader. Those assumptions include the following:

- ✓ You or someone you know has been diagnosed with osteoporosis, or you’re concerned about osteoporosis prevention.
- ✓ You want to know about both osteoporosis prevention *and* treatments.
- ✓ You want to know what to expect when you break a bone.
- ✓ You want to know how to find the right specialists for treating osteoporosis.
- ✓ You want to know how to treat the pain that inevitably accompanies a fracture.

We also assume that when you read each chapter or section, you want quick answers on any number of issues related to osteoporosis. The one theme we thread throughout every chapter and section is that an ounce of prevention is worth a ton of cure.

Osteoporosis isn’t inevitable. Fight it hard, with all the tools at your disposal. We hope that one day this book will be obsolete, because osteoporosis will be a disease of the past. And when that day comes, we’ll be dancing for joy — or doing some other weight-bearing exercise to strengthen our bones!

# How This Book Is Organized

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We divide *Osteoporosis For Dummies* into four parts. You don't have to read them in any order. Like any *For Dummies* book, you can skip to what you really need to know at the moment. The following sections explain how we organized this book.

# Part I: Understanding Your Bones

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This part starts with an explanation of what osteoporosis is, and why it's a serious health problem. We give you a crash course in Bone 101, and describe who gets osteoporosis and why. We review the most common risk factors for osteoporosis and some of the uncommon ones, too. In addition, we talk about the osteoporosis you don't hear much about: osteoporosis in men and kids.

## **Part II: Keeping Bones Healthy**

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In these chapters, we give you the best ammunition possible to fight osteoporosis. We also tell you what to eat and what types of exercise build the strongest bones.

## **Part III: Diagnosing and Treating Osteoporosis**

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If you have osteoporosis, you want to get to the nitty-gritty: how best to treat it, what the latest and best medications are, what to do if you break a bone, and what the future holds in the diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis. You can find it all and more in this part.



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