



Osteoporosis Canada

Ostéoporose Canada

**COPING**

September 10, 2014

## ***COPN: Proudly Celebrating our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*** **Osteoporosis – My Lifelong Journey** **by Loretta Brown**



My name is Loretta Brown and I want to share with you my journey of living with osteoporosis.

As a child I was lactose intolerant, which very likely contributed to my osteoporosis. Dairy products were part of our everyday life, especially on my grandparents' farm, so I learned very early on to either avoid dairy, or eat dairy and suffer the consequences.

In my adult years, my back was constantly in pain, especially when I overdid bending and lifting, which would often occur with housework and raising

children. I probably fractured a bone in my spine without even realizing it and the only solution back then was to take a pain tablet, lie down for a while until the pain subsided, then carry on.

Later in life I discovered that close family members, including my mother, had suffered from osteoporosis, but 60 plus years ago there was little information on this debilitating disease and few, if any, effective treatments.

Finally, in 1990, following a grand mal seizure and a hospital stay to treat pneumonia, I was diagnosed with severe osteoporosis when it was discovered that I had several vertebral fractures (broken bones in the spine). The pain was unbearable. With very little information to go on, I decided to investigate what options there were for self help. I located the Osteoporosis Canada website and the osteoporosis support group in Calgary run by the Alberta Chapter. Then my doctor referred me to the Osteoporosis Centre. Now, with the support of Osteoporosis Canada, the Alberta Chapter, the Osteoporosis Centre and my doctor, I am most fortunate in the medical treatment I am currently receiving for my fractures. I am leading a better life and moving forward with less pain.

Over the next few years, I had several more fractures, including my right wrist in 2002 and right foot in 2003, both requiring casts and a couple of months off work. In April, 2004, I fell during a freezing rain storm and sustained a spine fracture - the fracture that changed my life. I was off to the hospital again and off work for a few more months. The pain was so severe that I could not lift more than five pounds;

### **In this issue**

- Fracture Fact
- Osteoporosis – My Lifelong Journey
- Funny Bone
- A recipe from our sponsor

### **Fracture**

### **Fact:**

Every day,  
over 500  
Canadian men  
and women  
break a bone  
because of  
osteoporosis.

and even though my job was modified to meet my needs, I was unable to continue working. In the end, after working in banking for 38 years while raising a family, I retired in June, 2005.

My journey with osteoporosis, however, did not retire. On August 24, 2012, I fell in the house and crushed my right elbow - again off to the hospital! That night I was told that my bones were so soft, a rod had to be put in place. The next day, I had an operation for pins and a plate, but alas, my bones were too soft for the hardware to hold. Two weeks later, I had another operation for more hardware. What a nightmare! This third operation was a success, and although my elbow is not completely straight, it is functional.

Then, on August 19, 2013 I broke my left elbow, fractured ribs on my left side and damaged my wrists when I lost my footing and fell while out for a walk. Surgeons undertook almost the same procedure for hardware to be put into the left elbow. The fracture has healed and with the help of a good physiotherapist, the left elbow is straightening and bending to an even better degree than the right.

These fractures have robbed me of my quality of life and independence, as I am much more cautious now and limited in what I am able to do; but they have also taught me valuable lessons, which I have passed on to many others:

- 1) Do not become complacent about this disease. Carelessness can result in suffering the consequences of a devastating fracture.
- 2) Be aware of your surroundings and avoid rushing or sudden movements. If not done properly, lifting, reaching and even turning over in bed can cause a fracture.
- 3) Safe movements are very important. By not bending and stretching safely, I injured my ribs, causing mobility issues and pain that may have been prevented had I not broken my own rules.

After retiring in 2005, I started working as a volunteer for the Alberta Chapter and in 2006 I became Chair. I embraced this role with enthusiasm and pride. I am also a member of COPN (Canadian Osteoporosis Patients Network) and I served on the Executive Committee from 2009 to 2011. I am a strong advocate for those suffering from osteoporosis, hoping to prevent fractures by creating awareness, educating others and helping those already stricken to improve their lifestyle so they can live better with this disease. Now that we have more knowledge around diagnosis, medications and the importance of exercise and diet, life can be more enjoyable and the risk of fractures can be reduced.

In Alberta, where I live, oral treatments are available, but many people cannot tolerate the oral drugs. For these individuals, the injectable medications may be more suitable but they are out of reach financially if they are not covered by the provincial drug plan or if the individual does not meet the criteria for coverage. I am one of these as I had difficulty tolerating the oral medications. I believe that all Canadians with osteoporosis deserve the same access to treatment options that could benefit them regardless of where they live, and I advocate to try to bring this about.

With the support of my doctor, I have recently started taking a new medication. Although I may still have a long journey ahead of me, I am beginning to feel much stronger and more confident as the days roll by. I thank you for reading the story of my journey and I hope it will inspire you to join me in the fight against osteoporosis. Finally, I wish each and every one of you a fracture-free future.

**FUNNY BONE:** Teach a child to be polite and courteous in the home and, when she grows up, she'll never be able to merge her car onto a freeway.

## A Recipe from our Sponsor

### Tomato Fish Bake

Course: *Main Dishes*

Preparation Time: *20 min*

Cooking Time: *35-40 mins*

Yields: *4 servings*

*1 milk product serving(s) per person*

**For more information about this recipe:**

<http://www.dairygoodness.ca/getenough/recipes/tomato-fish-bake>



### Ingredients

1 cup (250 mL) fresh bread crumbs  
1 cup (250 mL) shredded **Canadian Mozzarella cheese**  
1 small onion, chopped  
1/2 tsp (2 mL) mixed dried herbs  
Salt and pepper  
1 3/4 cups (375 mL) **milk**, divided  
1 tbsp (15 mL) **butter**  
1/2 cup (125 mL) sliced mushrooms  
Pinch granulated sugar  
2 tbsp (30 mL) all-purpose flour  
2 tbsp (30 mL) tomato paste  
1 tsp (5 mL) freshly squeeze lemon juice  
2 large skinless white fish fillets (about 1 lb/500 g total), rinsed and patted dry  
Chopped fresh parsley

### Preparation

Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Butter a 13 x 9-inch (3 L) glass baking dish.

In a bowl, combine bread crumbs, cheese, onion, herbs, a pinch each, salt and pepper and 3 tbsp (45 mL) of the milk; set aside.

In a medium saucepan, melt butter over medium-high heat; sauté mushrooms, 1/4 tsp (1 mL) each, salt and pepper and sugar for about 5 minutes or until mushrooms are soft. Whisk flour into remaining milk; and gradually pour into saucepan, stirring. Stir in tomato paste; bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and boil gently, stirring, for about 3 minutes or until thick. Remove from heat; stir in lemon juice.

Place one fish fillet prepared baking dish. Spread bread stuffing over the fish and top with remaining fish fillet; pour sauce evenly over top.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until sauce is bubbling and fish flakes easily with a fork. Sprinkle with parsley.

**Tips:** Choose firm, white fish fillets that are about 1/2-inch (1 cm) thick for even cooking in this recipe. Haddock, large tilapia and pickerel are good choices.

**Variations:** Reduce bread crumbs to 1/2 cup (125 mL) and add 4 oz (125 g) finely chopped cooked shrimp. Add 2 tbsp (30 mL) chopped fresh basil to stuffing.

### This issue of COPING is sponsored by Dairy Farmers of Canada

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