

# COPING

'A newsletter from COPN'

November 13, 2009

*Remember: You can live well with osteoporosis!*

*Thought for Today:* It's better to sleep on your decisions than to stay awake over what you have done.

This is the second in a series of articles used with permission from the Dartmouth Osteoporosis Multidisciplinary Education Program, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

---

## Table of Contents

- i. Do I need a prescription
- ii. What are the best medications for osteoporosis?
- iii. Will my bone density go up with my prescription medication for osteoporosis
- iv. Funny Bone
- v. Important messages

---

### i) Do I need a prescription medication for osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis medications are useful because they can help decrease fracture risk. People who take these medications are much less likely to end up with a broken bone.

If we had a crystal ball that told us you were *not* going to have a fracture in the next 10 years, then you couldn't possibly get any benefit from taking a prescription medication for osteoporosis. People at low risk for a fracture are usually not given prescriptions for osteoporosis medications.

If you are at risk of breaking a bone, you need to do everything possible to prevent it. This would include:

- making sure that you eat a well balanced diet.
- getting an adequate amount of calcium and vitamin D through diet and/or supplements.
- helping you prevent falls.
- recommending good posture and regular exercises.

All of these measures will decrease your risk of fracture but we can still do better.

If you are at high risk for a fracture an osteoporosis prescription medication will definitely be recommended.

Are you at risk? Since we don't have a crystal ball, we look at your risk factors to help determine your risk. We consider:

- your age
- your gender
- your BMD measurement
- whether you have had fragility fractures after age 40
- whether you are taking Prednisone.

The **Risk Calculator** tool in the Oct 30, 2009 issue of COPING is a good way to determine your individual fracture risk.

If you are at **low risk**, there is no need for a prescription medication. Over time your risk will change, so check with your doctor. He/she will want to repeat your bone density test and reassess your risk in 5 - 10 years.

If you are at **high risk**, you would benefit from a prescription osteoporosis medication. Remember an osteoporosis medication alone is not sufficient. You need to make sure you have a healthy lifestyle (good diet, calcium, vitamin D, fall prevention, good posture and exercise). All of these things work best together.

Most people at **moderate risk** of fracture won't need to take a prescription medication but they will need to be regularly monitored. Deciding whether you need a prescription medication for osteoporosis will depend on factors other than the 5 listed above. Your doctor will make a decision based on other risk factors such as whether you are a smoker, whether you are prone to fall, whether there are fragility fractures in your family tree, etc. Not everyone at moderate risk will need a prescription medication, but all need to be monitored. Your doctor will recommend a bone density test in 1 - 5 years.

---

## ii) What are the best medications for osteoporosis?

The best medications for osteoporosis have been proven with careful research to greatly decrease the risk of fractures in patients with osteoporosis. We call these the "**first line medications**".

There are 5 first line medications currently available in Canada for the treatment of osteoporosis:

- alendronate (Fosamax®)
- risedronate (Actonel®)
- zoledronic acid (Aclasta®)
- raloxifene (Evista®)
- teriparatide (Forteo®)

Each medication has strengths and weaknesses. Your doctor will take several things into consideration when selecting your medication:

- ✓ your age
- ✓ your gender
- ✓ your risk of side-effects to the medication
- ✓ if you are likely to forget to take your medication
- ✓ other medications that you are taking
- ✓ whether you are taking Prednisone
- ✓ whether you are at risk for hip fractures
- ✓ your ability to pay for the medication
- ✓ whether the medication is covered by your province's drug reimbursement plan.

---

### iii) Will my bone density go up with my prescription medication for osteoporosis?

The job of the osteoporosis medication is to decrease your risk of fracture. Our best measure of success is **you not having any new fractures** once you are taking one of these medications (no new fractures once taking the medication faithfully for 6-12 months).

Remember we can't prevent all fractures. A traumatic injury like that from a motor vehicle accident can't be prevented. Also, for those with severe osteoporosis, reducing the rate of fracture from 3 fractures a year to 1 every 2 years would be considered a positive outcome.

Some osteoporosis medications increase bone density slightly while others increase your bone density more. The increase in bone density has little to do with whether or not the medications are working for you. The osteoporosis drugs work on improving the quality of your bones, and that can't be measured with an increase in bone density.

Knowing this, your doctor checks your bone density to see if the medication is keeping your bone density stable. Remember, after 35-45 years of age bone density generally starts to go down in most individuals. If your bone density is maintained then the medication is likely working.

***Osteoporosis medications improve bone strength by improving bone quality and not necessarily by increasing bone density.***

Used with permission from DOME (Dartmouth Osteoporosis Multidisciplinary Education Program), Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

*Watch for more information on medications in the next issue of COPING*

---

#### *iv) Funny Bone:*

Sign on a photographic shop – “Some day your prints will come”.

Sign on a bank window: “Don't kiss our women. They're tellers.”

---

## v) Important Messages

**Remember:** It is important for you to eat a **healthy diet**, get some appropriate **exercise**, take your **calcium and vitamin D** and if your doctor has prescribed a **medication** don't forget to take it as directed.

*COPING* will come to you every second Friday. We hope you enjoy it and find the information useful. Don't forget to log on to [www.osteoporosis.ca](http://www.osteoporosis.ca) for up to date information.

The material contained in this newsletter is provided for general information only. It should not be relied on to suggest a course of treatment for a particular individual or as a substitute for consultation with qualified health professionals who are familiar with your individual medical needs. Should you have any health care related questions or concerns, you should contact your physician. You should never disregard medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this or any newslet