# Understanding osteoporosis: a growing health crisis in the UK



The ongoing health crisis of osteoporosis is a significant concern in the UK, affecting an estimated 3.5 million individuals, particularly those over the age of 50. This condition is characterised by porous and fragile bones, which increases the likelihood of fractures. According to the Royal Osteoporosis Society (ROS), one in two women and one in five men over the age of 50 will experience a fracture attributed to this disease. The risk of developing osteoporosis escalates with age, making it a pressing issue within an aging population.

Queen Camilla, who has served as the president of the ROS since 2001, has a personal connection to the disease, having witnessed its devastating effects on her family. In a statement made to The Guardian, she reflected on her mother’s battle with osteoporosis, describing how her mother “quite literally shrank in front of our eyes.” Queen Camilla recounted that her mother lost about eight inches in height, which led to severe complications, including impaired digestion and a diminished quality of life.

Osteoporosis is often seen as an inevitable consequence of aging, exacerbated by factors such as hormonal changes, low body mass index, and certain medical conditions. Lifestyle choices, such as smoking and heavy alcohol consumption, further amplify risks. However, experts assert that proactive measures, including dietary improvements and exercise, can significantly enhance bone health and decrease the likelihood of fractures.

Calcium and vitamin D play crucial roles in sustaining bone strength, with the ROS advising that a balanced diet generally suffices in providing these essential nutrients. Nonetheless, during the winter months—when natural sunlight is scarce—it may be prudent for individuals in the UK to consider vitamin D supplementation.

Exercise is another vital component in combating osteoporosis. Contrary to common beliefs that older adults should avoid weight-bearing activities, experts encourage participation in exercises that can strengthen bones. Activities such as walking, climbing stairs, and sports involving impact can prove beneficial. Tara LaFerrara, a personal trainer from Texas, expressed to The Guardian that “the basics – strength training, impact-based movement and proper nutrition – apply to men and women.” She noted the added importance for post-menopausal women to focus on these areas to maintain bone density.

To assess the risk of developing osteoporosis, a healthcare professional may recommend a Dexa scan, which measures bone density using low-level X-rays. Prior to a scan, patients typically complete a Frax questionnaire developed by the University of Sheffield, which evaluates various risk factors for fractures, including age, sex, weight, family history, and lifestyle choices. Professor David Reid, an osteoporosis specialist, stated that for a scan to be considered, one must present with clinical risk factors, as scans are not routinely provided upon request.

Through these assessments, individuals can gain insight into their bone health and take necessary precautions. Reports from patients indicate that, while exercise may not entirely reverse bone loss, it can potentially mitigate risk. Sarah Leyland, an osteoporosis nurse and ROS clinical adviser, cautioned against over-reliance on exercise as a standalone solution. She acknowledged that while recent evidence suggests exercise may improve bone density, further research is required to understand its implications fully, particularly for those already at a higher risk.

In exploring personal experiences with the condition, some individuals highlighted positive outcomes from incorporating weight training and cardiovascular activities into their routines. For instance, one woman reported a significant improvement in her bone density after eight years of treatment with bisphosphonates and a commitment to running. Yet, challenges persist, as evidenced by the experience of another runner diagnosed with osteopenia who continues to manage the risks associated with falls and fractures.

The ROS emphasises that a multi-faceted approach, combining appropriate medication and lifestyle changes, is essential for those diagnosed with osteoporosis. Currently, solutions range from anti-resorptive medications to hormone replacement therapy, all aiming to bolster bone strength.

In summary, osteoporosis continues to pose a serious risk for millions in the UK, particularly among older populations. With several contributing factors and potential preventative measures, awareness and education surrounding the disease remain crucial for maintaining bone health and minimising the risks of fractures.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://theros.org.uk/latest-news/1-400-lives-set-to-be-needlessly-lost-this-year-following-government-inaction-on-osteoporosis/> - This URL supports the claim that osteoporosis is a significant health crisis in the UK, affecting millions, especially those over 50, with half of women over 50 likely to suffer fractures due to osteoporosis.
* <https://www.osteoporosis.foundation/sites/iofbonehealth/files/scope-2021/UK%20report.pdf> - This report corroborates the prevalence of osteoporosis in the UK and its impact, including the percentage of men and women affected and the associated healthcare costs.
* <https://theros.org.uk/latest-news/thousands-get-early-osteoporosis-diagnosis-after-using-risk-checker-launched-with-her-majesty-the-queen/> - This article highlights the use of bone health risk checkers to identify people at risk of osteoporosis, emphasizing early diagnosis and prevention through lifestyle changes.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/osteoporosis/prevention/> - Although not directly searched, NHS advice supports the importance of lifestyle factors such as diet and exercise in managing osteoporosis risk.
* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2343336/> - This article from the National Institute of Health discusses the role of vitamin D and calcium in bone health, relevant to managing osteoporosis.
* <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/FRAX/index.aspx> - This URL supports the use of the FRAX tool by the University of Sheffield for assessing fracture risk in individuals.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/apr/06/the-strong-bone-secret-can-you-avoid-or-even-reverse-osteoporosis> - Please view link - unable to able to access data