

Osteoporosis

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a condition in which the bones become fragile and brittle, leading to a higher risk of fracture than in normal bone. This occurs when bones lose minerals such as calcium, leading to a loss of bone density. There are no obvious symptoms of osteoporosis until a fracture occurs. Consequently, a person will not know that they have osteoporosis unless it is diagnosed by clinical tests or if they have an osteoporotic fracture.

How is osteoporosis related to coeliac disease?

Osteoporosis can be caused by the chronic inflammatory process in untreated coeliac disease which impairs how well the body can lay down new bone. Moreover, when the small bowel is damaged by coeliac disease, insufficient calcium and vitamin D can be absorbed. Calcium is the key mineral that contributes to bone strength and plays a vital role at a cellular level within the body's tissues and fluids. This requires a stable blood level of calcium. Vitamin D is a critical hormone that improves calcium absorption and is important for bone health. If insufficient dietary calcium and vitamin D are absorbed to maintain the required level of calcium in the blood, more is taken from the bones than can be replaced, causing bones to weaken.

Untreated coeliac disease will impact on a growing child and mean their bones may not reach optimal bone mass. Early diagnosis and treatment of coeliac disease is important to avoid this complication.

Osteoporosis affects 2 in 3 women who reach the age of 60 and 1 in 3 men. The risk is even higher in those with coeliac disease and can occur much earlier in life.

How can I be tested for osteoporosis?

Bone strength can be measured using a Dual-energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DXA) scan, commonly known as a bone density test. A small amount of X-ray is used to measure the density of your bones in the spine and hip. By comparing your bone density to an average adult of the same gender, a 'T-score' is calculated, and used to determine whether you have osteoporosis or are at risk of developing osteoporosis. In children, T-scores are not used as their bones are still growing.

Medicare rebate

A person medically diagnosed with coeliac disease is entitled to a Medicare rebate, every two years, for a bone density measurement under item number 12315, 'a proven malabsorptive disorder'. Ask the provider what their charges are at the time of booking your appointment, and whether this is the scheduled fee covered by the rebate, as there can be an out of pocket expense with some providers.

How often do I need to have a bone density test?

All adults diagnosed with coeliac disease should have their bone density checked. Your doctor will let you know if you need to have the test repeated. Where possible, it is important to have your bone density test repeated on the same bone densitometer at the clinic or hospital you attended for your initial visit. There can be slight differences in results obtained on different machines.

For further information
1300 458 836
www.coeliac.org.au

Coeliac Australia is not a medical organisation. Persons reading this material should not act solely on it. The advice of a medical practitioner should always be obtained.

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What is the treatment for osteoporosis?

Adequate dietary calcium and weight bearing exercises are important. Additional treatments are often recommended. Specific, very effective, medications are also now available. Speak to your doctor about the different treatments for osteoporosis. Smoking and a high intake of alcohol should be avoided.

For further information**Osteoporosis Australia**

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