

Myths and Realities of Bone Health

Over several decades, scientists have learned a significant amount about the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of bone disease. Our next and most critical step is to transfer this knowledge from the research laboratories to the general population.

Myth: Only a small segment of the population suffers from osteoporosis or other bone diseases.

Reality: Osteoporosis is a silent condition that affects millions of Americans. Ten million Americans over age 50 have osteoporosis, the most common bone disease. Another 34 million Americans have low bone mass. If we do not take immediate action, by 2020, half of all Americans over age 50 will have weak bones from osteoporosis and low bone mass.

Myth: Osteoporosis is only a problem for older White women.

Reality: One of the most dangerous myths about osteoporosis is that only women need to worry about bone health. Osteoporosis affects men and women of all races. While bone weakness is manifested in older Americans, strong bones begin in childhood. Americans of all ages must take steps to protect their bone health.

Myth: Bone fractures from falls or injuries have nothing to do with osteoporosis.

Reality: Fractures in individuals over the age of 50 can be the first sign of weak bones from osteoporosis or low bone mass. Each year, 1.5 million older Americans suffer a fracture due to bone disease.

Myth: Diagnosing osteoporosis or other bone diseases is a lengthy and painful process.

Reality: A bone density test, the primary test that is used to screen for osteoporosis, is a simple and painless procedure that takes less than 5-10 minutes to complete.

Myth: Osteoporosis cannot be prevented.

Reality: Individuals can do a lot to promote their bone health, beginning in childhood and continuing into old age. With proper nutrition, physical activity and medical attention, Americans can have strong bones and live longer, healthier lives.

Myth: Once you get osteoporosis, nothing can be done to treat it.

Reality: If diagnosed, osteoporosis can be treated with new drugs that help prevent bone loss and rebuild bone. These can help to prevent life-threatening and painful fractures.

Myth: Osteoporosis and other bone diseases have no physical consequences.

Reality: Osteoporosis and bone disease often result in painful and debilitating fractures. A fracture can lead to a downward spiral in physical and mental health that, for some people, can even result in death. The risk of death is especially high during the first year after the fracture. Many individuals with fractures experience significant pain, loss of height, and may lose their ability to dress themselves, stand up, and walk. Of those who remain independent, a fracture often leads to a reduced quality of life.

Myth: There are no emotional consequences from osteoporosis and other bone diseases.

Reality: Fractures may lead to a loss of self-esteem and body image, and a change in mood, all of which cause significant anxiety and depression. Individuals who have been immobilized by a fracture may fear they will fall again and suffer additional fractures.

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