

Tips for moving safely

You can help protect your spine by:

- **NOT** bending forward from the waist
- **NOT** twisting and bending at the torso (trunk) to an extreme
- **NOT** carrying packages that are too heavy
- **NOT** bending forward when coughing and sneezing
- **NOT** reaching up for items on high shelves
- **NOT** doing toe-touches, sit-ups or abdominal crunches

What if I have a spine fracture?

If you've broken a bone in your spine, an osteoporosis medicine can help you prevent future fractures. Spine fractures can take several weeks or longer to heal. To help you recover, your healthcare provider may prescribe a temporary back brace, physical therapy or pain medication.

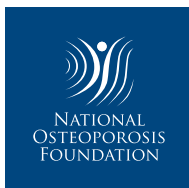
If you continue to have ongoing pain, your healthcare provider may also suggest a special procedure to stabilize the fracture. For some people, these procedures can help relieve pain caused by spine fractures. Always talk to your healthcare provider about the benefits and risks of the options available to you.

The information in this brochure can be found in NOF's educational publication *Boning Up on Osteoporosis: A Guide to Prevention and Treatment*.

You can request free educational handouts by calling (800) 231-4222 or by sending an email to request@nof.org



Osteoporosis and Your Spine



www.nof.org

What is a spine fracture?

Your spine is made up of small bones called vertebrae. When these bones break, they're called spine fractures, vertebral fractures or compression fractures. Broken bones in the spine are the most common type of fractures in people with osteoporosis.

People with osteoporosis can break bones in the spine from a fall, a twisting motion of the torso or carrying a load that is too heavy for a fragile spine. In some people, a simple movement such as rolling over in bed or coughing can cause bones in the spine to break. When this happens, you may feel sharp pain that doesn't get better. You may not feel any pain at all or have other noticeable symptoms.



How can I learn if I have a spine fracture?

Starting around age 50, have your height measured at the same doctor's office each year. If you've had height loss, posture changes or back pain, you may need an x-ray or vertebral fracture assessment (VFA). X-rays and VFAs can show breaks in the spine. A VFA is done on a dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) machine.



Symptoms of spine fractures

Over time, spine fractures can cause height loss and changes in your posture. You may first notice that your clothes do not fit right or that your upper back is curving forward. This curve is called kyphosis. It causes a person's posture to look stooped or hunched. When it is severe, it is commonly known as a Dowager's hump. Kyphosis causes the muscles, tendons and ligaments in the back to become strained and stretched.

Other signs and symptoms may include:

- Constant pain
- Problems sleeping
- Pinched nerves in the back
- Anxiety, depression or decreased self-esteem
- Fear of future fractures and falling
- Decreased quality of life

Severe kyphosis can reduce the space for internal organs. It may also cause the stomach or abdomen to push forward and appear to stick out. This can make breathing and eating difficult and prevent people from getting the nutrition that their body needs.

Preventing spine fractures

The following three steps can help you prevent spine fractures and kyphosis:

Step 1. Exercise and move safely. Weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening exercise can help prevent further bone loss. A physical therapist can teach you how to exercise and move safely to strengthen your back and protect your spine. Also, turn to the next page to learn "Tips for moving safely."

Step 2. Get enough calcium and vitamin D for your bone health.

- Adults age 50 and older need 1,200 milligrams (mg) of calcium from all sources* and 800-1,000 international units (IU) of vitamin D every day.
- Adults under age 50 need 1,000 mg of calcium from all sources* and 400-800 IUs of vitamin D every day.

*This includes the total amount of calcium you get from both food and supplements.

Some people may need more vitamin D. You can find out if you are getting enough with a blood test that checks your vitamin D level.

Step 3. Consider taking an osteoporosis medicine. If you've broken a bone in your spine, speak with your healthcare provider about taking a medicine to reduce your risk of fractures. People who have spine fractures are at very high risk of breaking more bones, especially in the spine. NOF encourages people to look at both the risks and benefits of taking or not taking a medicine.