OSTEOPOROSIS NEW ZEALAND
Better bones, fewer fractures

Osteoporosis and Osteopenia:

What they mean for you and your bones

What are Osteopenia and Osteoporosis?

Bone density is simply a measure of how solid and strong your bones are. Much like height or weight, they vary from person to person.

- **Osteopenia** means your bones are weaker 'than normal' on the bone strength scale, but not yet at the level of osteoporosis.
- **Osteoporosis** means your bones have become considerably more fragile, making fractures more likely.

Think of bone density as a strength scale for your bones

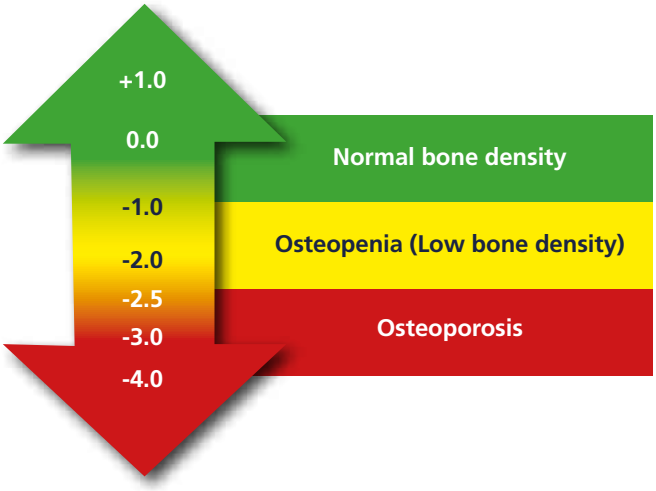
Fragility fractures can occur in people with either osteopenia or osteoporosis. You should not wait until your bones are in the Osteoporosis range to be proactive about your bones particularly if you have already had a fragility fracture - a break from a minor bump or fall from standing height - then osteopenia or osteoporosis become even more important to address early.

The bone density spectrum

Imagine a single continuum or sliding scale: at one end you have strong, healthy bones; in the middle osteopenia; at the other end osteoporosis.

Most people who sustain a fragility fracture are in the osteopenic or osteoporotic range.

The good news: when bone density begins to drop (osteopenia) there is still a chance to act early, slow or reverse the weakening, and reduce the risk of progression into full osteoporosis.



Why it matters: fractures can change your life

Fragility fractures - including hip, spine or wrist fractures - often occur with minimal trauma when bones are weak. They can have serious implications: pain, loss of independence, reduced quality of life and a higher risk of having another fracture in the future.

If you have osteoporosis, treatment with medication to reduce fracture risk is required.

If you have osteopenia, it is a strong warning sign, and the time to talk to your healthcare provider about what to do is now.

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What you can do: act now

Whether you are in the osteopenic range or have already been diagnosed with osteoporosis, you can start taking steps to protect your bones:

Lifestyle: maintain a healthy weight (BMI 20-25), engage in weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening exercise; eat a balanced diet with sufficient calcium and protein; ensure safe sun exposure to maintain vitamin D levels; avoid smoking and limit alcohol.

Treatment: if you have already had a fragility fracture or have osteoporosis, medication is usually needed to reduce future fracture risk. For osteopenia, talk with your doctor about your overall risk profile and what early intervention may be appropriate.

New research: what it means for younger post-menopausal women

A large 10-year study conducted by researchers at the University of Auckland found that women aged 50 to 60 years, with bone density in the "lower-than-normal but not osteoporotic" range, who received just one or two infusions over 10 years of a medicine called zoledronate, reduced their risk of new vertebral fractures and other major fragility fractures by around 30 to 40 percent compared with placebo (A non-active treatment group).

This matters because it shows that early intervention can significantly reduce future fracture risk.

Key takeaway for you:

If you are a post-menopausal woman in your 50s or early 60s, and especially if you have additional risk factors such as a previous fragility fracture, a family history of osteoporosis or hip fracture, or low body weight, this research suggests that starting bone-health discussions early is a smart move, alongside healthy lifestyle choices and appropriate assessment.

Strong bones matter throughout life.

If you have osteopenia, treat it as a wake-up call.

If you have osteoporosis, act without delay.

Early steps make a lasting difference.

Know Your Bones.™ Visit osteoporosis.org.nz/take-the-test

Complete the online bone health assessment and you'll receive a personalised report explaining your risk of fracture and recommendations for better bone health.

If you would like to assist us in helping others like yourself, please consider donating to Osteoporosis NZ.
Visit our website www.osteoporosis.org.nz and click donate