



For People With Osteoporosis: How to Find a Doctor

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Isabel Johnson, age 64 years old, picked up a brochure on osteoporosis at her local pharmacy. What she read about the "silent disease" concerned her. She learned that she had a few risk factors: she had gone through menopause at an early age, and her mother had suffered several fractures in her seventies and eighties.

Isabel called her neighbor, a registered nurse, who suggested that she discuss her concerns with a doctor. Isabel wondered how to find a doctor with expertise in osteoporosis.

For many people, finding a doctor who is knowledgeable about osteoporosis can be difficult. There is no physician specialty dedicated solely to osteoporosis, nor is there a certification program for health professionals who treat the disease. A variety of medical specialists treat people with osteoporosis, including internists, gynecologists, family doctors, endocrinologists, rheumatologists, physiatrists, orthopaedists, and geriatricians.

There are a number of ways to find a doctor who treats osteoporosis patients. If you have a primary care or family doctor, discuss your concerns with him or her. Your doctor may treat the disease or be able to refer you to an osteoporosis specialist.

If you are enrolled in a health maintenance organization (HMO) or a managed care health plan, consult your assigned doctor about osteoporosis. This doctor should be able to give you an appropriate referral.

If you do not have a personal doctor or if your doctor cannot help, contact your nearest university hospital or academic health center and ask for the department that cares for patients with osteoporosis. The department will vary from institution to institution. For example, in some facilities, the department of endocrinology or metabolic bone disease treats osteoporosis patients. In other medical centers, the appropriate department may be rheumatology, orthopaedics, or gynecology. Some hospitals have a separate osteoporosis program or women's clinic that treats patients with osteoporosis.

Once you have identified a doctor, you may wish to ask whether the doctor has specialized training in osteoporosis, how much of the practice is dedicated to osteoporosis, and whether he or she uses bone mass measurement.

Your own primary care doctor—whether an internist, orthopaedist, or gynecologist—is often the best person to treat you because she or he knows your medical history, your lifestyle, and your special needs.

Medical Specialists Who Treat Osteoporosis

After an initial assessment, it may be necessary to see an endocrinologist, a rheumatologist, or another specialist to rule out the possibility of an underlying disease that may contribute to osteoporosis:

Endocrinologists treat the endocrine system, which comprises the glands and hormones that help control the body's metabolic activity. In addition to osteoporosis, endocrinologists treat diabetes and diseases of the thyroid and pituitary glands.

Rheumatologists diagnose and treat diseases of the bones, joints, muscles and tendons, including arthritis and collagen diseases.

Family doctors have a broad range of training that includes internal medicine, gynecology, and pediatrics. They place special emphasis on caring for an individual or family on a long-term, continuing basis.

Geriatricians are family doctors or internists who have received additional training on the aging process and the conditions and diseases that often occur among the elderly, including incontinence, falls, and dementia. Geriatricians often care for patients in nursing homes, in patients' homes, or in office or hospital settings.

Gynecologists diagnose and treat conditions of the female reproductive system and associated disorders. They often serve as primary care doctors for women and follow their patients' reproductive health over time.

Internists are trained in general internal medicine. They diagnose and treat many diseases. Internists provide long-term comprehensive care in the hospital and office, have expertise in many areas, and often act as consultants to other specialists.

Orthopaedic surgeons are doctors trained in the care of patients with musculoskeletal conditions, such as congenital skeletal malformations, bone fractures and infections, and metabolic problems.

Physiatrists are doctors who specialize in physical medicine and rehabilitation. They evaluate and treat patients with impairments, disabilities, or pain arising from various medical problems, including bone fractures. Physiatrists focus on restoring the physical, psychological, social, and vocational functioning of the individual.

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For Your Information

This publication contains information about medications used to treat the health condition discussed here. When this publication sheet was developed, we included the most up-to-date (accurate) information available. Occasionally, new information on medication is released.

For updates and for any questions about any medications you are taking, please contact the Food and Drug Administration toll free at 888-INFO-FDA (463-6332) or visit its website at www.fda.gov. For additional information on specific medications, visit Drugs@FDA at www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda. Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

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