



## **Osteopenia? Osteoporosis? Stand Up and Get Moving!!**

Jennifer R. Whaley, PT

\*20-25 million American women have osteopenia and don't know it

\*Greater than 50% of all women will experience osteoporotic fractures during their lives...

The above statistics are startling and illustrate the need for us to know more about osteoporosis. This disease can affect males or females, all ages, and all ethnic backgrounds. Everyone is at risk and we need to be educated as to what osteoporosis is, know our potential risks, but most importantly know how to prevent and manage this disease. Instead of focusing on osteoporosis as a post menopausal problem, we need to also recognize that building bone during adolescence and young adulthood is equally as important.

Studies prove that calcium intake decreases the rate or amount of bone loss, but has much greater success when combined with moderate exercise. A Physical Therapist can play an important role in providing osteopenia/osteoporosis education, and in developing an individual program for you to maximize your potential and activity level without increasing your risk. Bone loss is a painless process and takes place gradually—therefore you should not wait for symptoms to take preventive steps and begin an appropriate exercise program.

**Osteopenia**—the beginning stages of bone loss. Most people have no symptoms of the disease at this stage, however many people will go on to develop osteoporosis. In general, osteopenia means that your body is losing bone mass faster than what is considered “normal” for your age/gender.

**Osteoporosis**—a significant % of bone loss has occurred. Many people will still have no symptoms. People diagnosed with osteoporosis are at much greater risk of sustaining a fracture.

Physical Therapy (PT) can be an ideal option for those diagnosed with osteopenia/osteoporosis. A Physical Therapist completes a thorough evaluation and develops a comprehensive plan of care. An evaluation includes range of motion assessment, strength/endurance testing, postural and balance assessment, gait analysis, and discussion of current activities and limitations as well as goals. The PT should then develop an individualized plan of care based upon your level of discomfort, postural

habits, activity level, and current physical status. A treatment plan may consist of: pain relief techniques (such as soft tissue mobilization/myofascial release, moist heat, ultrasound, gentle stretching), postural education and correction, balance activities, gait training, stretching/strengthening program, assistance with activities of daily living, and in-depth instruction in your personalized home exercise program

Many people know that with a diagnosis of osteoporosis they should emphasize weight bearing and resistance activities in their exercise routines. Some great examples of these exercises are walking, dancing, rowing, and resistance exercises with your back supported. Depending on the individual, unsupervised use of free weights is many times not recommended because it is easy to do these exercises incorrectly or with poor posture. Activities that should be avoided with osteoporosis are those that involve compression/flexion of the spine (bending forward). This may include knee to chest exercises, straight leg raises, and toe touches. Research shows that people with osteoporosis who perform flexion exercises are at significant risk for fractures.

Despite the fact that many individuals with osteopenia/osteoporosis have no symptoms, it is important to know that there are exercises, postural changes, and other lifestyle changes that can help manage the disease and prevent future issues. A physical therapist trained in treating individuals with osteoporosis can best meet these needs and help you successfully manage your condition. Don't wait until you have suffered a fracture, or are unable to stand up straight before seeking therapy. Prevention is always the easiest and most successful way to optimize your quality of life!

*Jennifer Whaley is a physical therapist and owner of Physical Therapy for Women, Inc. At **Physical Therapy for Women, Inc.**, pts receive therapy by a licensed Physical Therapist who specializes in Women's Health. Therapy sessions are private, one-hour sessions with direct hands on treatment by the therapist. Patients need to be referred by their physician to receive these services. Most insurances are accepted, and services are reimbursed as for any other PT diagnosis. Physical Therapy for Women, Inc. is located on Oleander Drive in Wilmington, NC. PTFW can be reached by calling (910)798-2318. If you have any questions regarding our services, or would be interested in scheduling a luncheon at your office, please do not hesitate to contact us. We welcome your interest and thank you for your support.*