



# ESSENTIAL CAREGIVER TIPS FOR OSTEOPOROSIS SUPPORT

As a **caregiver** your compassionate **support** makes a world of difference to a patient's life – and may help your relative or friend remain longer in the comfort of their own home!

By **helping** with activities of daily life, offering **emotional support**, and **assisting** with the overall management of the disease, you are significantly improving their quality of life.

In this leaflet, we provide some basic information and tips to help you provide the best possible support.



## 1 KNOWING HEALTH SPECIALISTS

As a caregiver, it's important for you to be well-informed about the various phases your patient will experience while visiting the doctor.



### EVALUATION

Many different types of doctors can evaluate and treat osteoporosis, but most patients start by visiting their family doctor. The doctor will likely perform an assessment and may then refer the patient to a specialist. While there is no one type of medical speciality dedicated to osteoporosis, doctors who are experienced in treating osteoporosis are often endocrinologists, rheumatologists, or geriatricians. Among other things, the doctor will ask about the patient's medical history and lifestyle to determine if he or she has any risk factors for osteoporosis, including whether any medications taken could be causing bone loss or increasing the risk of falling.



### TESTING

The doctor may also order blood or urine tests and suggest a **bone mineral density (BMD)** test, a quick and painless assessment. The most accurate way to measure BMD is the dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA). It can detect changes in bone density with great precision. This provides a metric that may be used to monitor a patient's progress over time and with treatment.



### TREATMENT

Different types of osteoporosis medications are available that have been proven to be effective in minimizing additional bone loss and helping to reduce the risk of fractures.

- Your patient's doctor should explain the benefits and side effects of each medication, and **discuss the most effective course of treatment.**
- As a caregiver, you may be asked to help the patient take medication in the appropriate dose and timeframe as prescribed. A pill box is very helpful if the patient needs to take a few different medications.
- If the patient experiences side effects, let the doctor know: medication should never be stopped without first talking to the doctor.
- While medication is essential, there are additional factors that promote good bone health, including exercise, nutrition and home safety.

## 2 ADVOCATING FOR THE PATIENT

As a caregiver, you likely have a good understanding of the patient's daily life and any symptoms they may have. With the patient's consent, you can become more actively involved in their care by providing input that may greatly influence which treatments a doctor recommends.

### 1. Be prepared

To make the most of any medical visit, start by preparing a medical record for the patient (*example at the end of this leaflet*) that can be brought to all doctor's appointments and hospital admissions.

### 2. Advocate for the patient

Ask questions about the evaluation and treatment and speak up on the patient's behalf to bring attention to their concerns.

### 3. Take notes

Take notes on the patient's behalf and ask questions at the appointment. **Some questions you should ask include:**

- *What are the benefits [of a particular treatment]?*
- *What are the potential side effects?*
- *Are there alternative treatments?*
- *When and how should the medication / supplements be taken?*
- *What are the exercise and nutritional recommendations?*

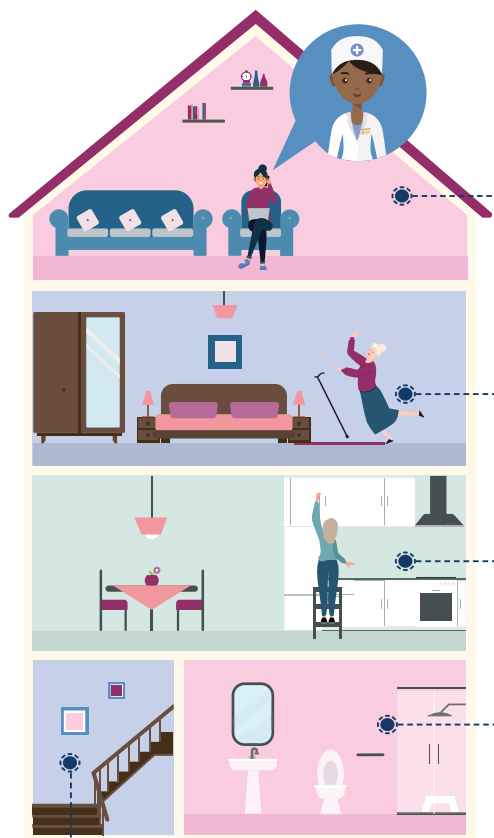
### 4. Provide administrative assistance

In **some countries** the **health insurance** situation can be complex and you may need to help with paper work and be aware of the patient's specific insurance requirements or restrictions in regard to reimbursement.

### 3 FALL AND FRACTURE PREVENTION

For anyone with osteoporosis, keeping bones from breaking is the main challenge. Unfortunately, **falls resulting in a broken bone are common**, can occur easily, **and can be debilitating**.

As a caregiver, you can help the patient prevent stumbles and falls by removing barriers and obstacles in the home, or by installing grab bars (next to the toilet or the shower for example). For someone with osteoporosis, **routine tasks** such as lifting heavy objects or even pushing a heavy vacuum **may be enough to break a bone!**



**Accessing expert advice**, for example from an Occupational Therapist, at an early stage is highly recommended since not all home adaptations are appropriate in every situation.

**Falls can be embarrassing and hard to talk about, so be sure not to blame if they occur.** Talk about falls with the patient in a way that can foster safety at home, and connections to exercise programs and services in the community for additional support.

Encourage the patient to **avoid unnecessary risks** by **discouraging risky activities** such as climbing step ladders or moving heavy furniture, and, if needed, suggest they **use support aids** such as canes or walkers.

You can help the patient prevent stumbles and falls by **removing barriers and obstacles** in the home, or by **installing grab bars** (next to the toilet or the shower for example).

You can **keep walkways clear of hazards** and **perform household chores** that would otherwise pose an unnecessary risk to the patient.

### 4 GOOD NUTRITION

Good nutrition is critical to slowing the progression of osteoporosis.



As a caregiver, you can perform in-home meal care preparation to provide patients with meals that are rich in bone-healthy nutrients such as calcium, protein and vitamin D.



A patient who has broken a bone due to osteoporosis, or is recovering after surgery, will need more protein than usual to heal. Even if they have less appetite, it is still important to ensure that they are getting enough calories, by offering snacks for example.



Calcium and Vitamin D supplementation is often prescribed to ensure that people with osteoporosis are getting enough of these essential vitamins. The body absorbs calcium best in amounts of 500-600 mg at a time. The recommended amount of calcium for older adults or people with osteoporosis is around 1000-1200 mg/per day, including calcium obtained from foods.

#### TIP!

**Finding ways to make meal time social and enjoyable can also help support nutrition.** Visit our bone-healthy recipes page to find tasty, nutritious recipes for the whole family. <https://www.osteoporosis.foundation/patients/recipes>





## 5 LIFESTYLE ASSISTANCE

Anyone with osteoporosis should consider lifestyle choices that will keep their bones as healthy as possible. This includes **limiting alcohol** and **no smoking**, and ensuring appropriate bone and muscle-strengthening **exercise**.



### EXERCISE

People with osteoporosis need regular **weight-bearing activities** to keep bones and muscles strong and to **improve balance**, both of which contribute to fewer falls and bone breaks. As a caregiver, you can help with physical activities designed to **strengthen bones and muscles**, by physically supporting the patient as needed while doing balance-related exercises.

- If the person you are supporting needs more help than you can safely provide with any physical activity or exercise, then change to an easier exercise.
- It is challenging to perform an exercise and pay attention to good form therefore you will be of great help by watching for the exercise to be completed correctly, which can prevent injury.
- Consider enrolling the patient in special exercise classes for seniors or people with osteoporosis, or organizing physiotherapy sessions with professional supervision.

### MOTIVATION AND SUPPORT

Living with osteoporosis is physically and emotionally difficult and one of the greatest roles that you as a caregiver can have is to **motivate and support lifestyle changes**. Your regular presence allows patients the opportunity to accomplish things they may not have been able to do on their own.

## 6 FALLS AND FRACTURES: CARE AND PREVENTION

As a caregiver, there is a chance you will be in the home at the time someone with osteoporosis falls. This is a frightening situation for all involved. In understanding how to react, you can be better prepared to stay calm and help in the most effective way. **To learn more, read the formal patient fall protocol on the following page.**

Even the best care won't prevent all fractures in people with severe osteoporosis. Hip fractures are some of the most common, and healing requires surgery and extensive recovery. However, there are many other fracture types and all breaks require specialized care. As a caregiver you can make it possible for the patient to recover from these breaks at home, following medical treatment, rather than at a care facility.

### PREVENTING SECONDARY FRACTURES

After a fracture, a patient is at high risk of suffering a second fracture, and that risk is highest within two years. The patient requires osteoporosis testing and treatment to reduce the risk of future fractures.

**Enquire whether the hospital has a 'Fracture Liaison Service' to ensure optimal post-fracture care.**



### TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF TOO

**Don't forget to prioritize your own health and take on only what you are capable of.**

The greatest quality of care is only possible if you are happy and healthy! Use some downtime to focus on yourself and your well-being.

### FINDING HELPFUL INFORMATION



#### Contact your local osteoporosis society

for information about patient support groups or exercise guidance.

A list of societies is available on the IOF website: [www.osteoporosis.foundation/patients#who-is-fighting-with-us](http://www.osteoporosis.foundation/patients#who-is-fighting-with-us)



#### Visit the Build Better Bones website

This International Osteoporosis Foundation platform provides easy-to-follow exercise guidance, information about bone-healthy nutrition, and tips for caregivers. [www.buildbetterbones.org](http://www.buildbetterbones.org)



#### Visit the Capture the Fracture® website

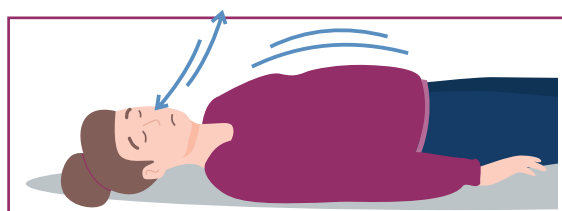
You can see the global map of hospitals with fracture liaison services.  
[www.capturethefracture.org/map-of-best-practice](http://www.capturethefracture.org/map-of-best-practice)



## OSTEOPOROSIS PATIENT FALL PROTOCOL

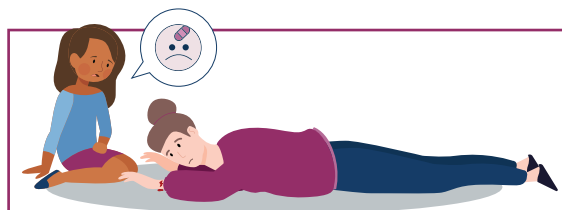


**Lower yourself so you are level with the patient** and talk to them to ensure that they are conscious.



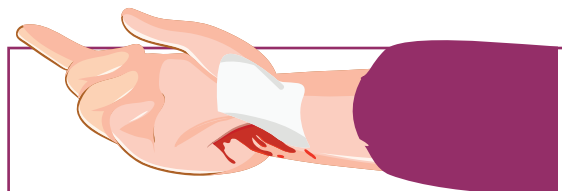
**If they are unconscious**, assess whether the patient is breathing by observing the rise and fall of the chest cavity or by holding two fingers below their nose to feel for breath. If they are not breathing, call Emergency Medical Services immediately and begin basic life support.

**Emergency services number** \_\_\_\_\_



**If the patient is conscious**, ask if they are in pain and where it is localized. Observe whether the patient has sustained any visible injury.

If yes – do not move the patient and call Emergency Medical Services immediately.



**If the patient is bleeding**, apply pressure to the wound with a sterile pad until bleeding stops or help has arrived.



If the patient has **fallen from a height**, do not move the patient and call Emergency Medical Services immediately, as they may have injured their neck or spine.



**If the patient has no obvious injuries and is not in pain**, have them bend their strongest leg and log roll them onto that side. From there, gently roll the patient onto their stomach. If the patient experiences pain or loss of sensation at any point, cease all movement and await emergency medical services. Once they have the support of their forearms, gently have the patient rise onto all fours, so you may more easily help them up.



Even if the patient seems to be in good health after the fall, it is **strongly advised that they see a physician shortly after** to assess any unforeseen injuries.



# THE BONE HEALTH VISIT



## PATIENT INFORMATION AND VISIT NOTES

Use this to form to keep important information all in one place, and in preparation for medical appointments  
Be sure to have any necessary insurance cards/information with you.

Patient name

Address

Date of birth



## MEDICAL CONTACT INFORMATION

Primary/family doctor

Name

Contact information

## Specialist doctors or other healthcare providers

Name

Name

Specialty

Specialty

Contact information

Contact information

Name

Name

Specialty

Specialty

Contact information

Contact information

Name

Name

Specialty

Specialty

Contact information

Contact information



## MEDICATIONS

### Non-osteoporosis medications the patient is currently taking

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Start/stop date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Start/stop date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Start/stop date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

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How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Start/stop date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Start/stop date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Start/stop date \_\_\_\_\_

*Notes* \_\_\_\_\_

### Osteoporosis medications the patient has been prescribed

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Special instructions \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Special instructions \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Special instructions \_\_\_\_\_

**Nutritional supplements the patient has been newly prescribed or is taking**

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Special instructions \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication and dosage \_\_\_\_\_

How/when to take \_\_\_\_\_ Special instructions \_\_\_\_\_



**BONE DENSITY TESTING INFORMATION**

If possible, always have bone density tested at the same facility.

Test results will include T-scores for the bones in the hip, spine and possibly other bones.

Name of facility \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

T-score for hip or femoral neck: \_\_\_\_\_

T-score for spine \_\_\_\_\_

Other information \_\_\_\_\_

Name of facility \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

T-score for hip or femoral neck: \_\_\_\_\_

T-score for spine \_\_\_\_\_

Other information \_\_\_\_\_

**Fracture Risk Assessment (FRAX) Probability**

Major osteoporotic \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Hip \_\_\_\_\_

Visit Notes \_\_\_\_\_

DATES OF NEXT APPOINTMENT(S) \_\_\_\_\_