

» What you need to know

Essential health information for women



Irish
Osteoporosis
Society



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MERCK SHARP & DOHME

Ireland (Human Health) Limited

Welcome!

Dear reader

I'm a firm believer that being informed and taking action now to protect our health as we get older is one of the most important things we can do, not only for ourselves but also for our families. So when the Irish Osteoporosis Society invited me to support this campaign I was delighted to help.



We are now living longer than our mothers did and it's important that we take care not only of our own health but also our children's and in many cases our parents' health as well.

The aim of this booklet is to give you an overview of the important aspects of health for women. Recent research carried out by the Irish Osteoporosis Society, the International Osteoporosis Foundation and the European Institute of Women's Health has shown that even though Irish women know more than our European counterparts about some health issues such as osteoporosis we are not doing enough to prevent our risk of suffering from this painful disease.

The good news is that it's never too late to take steps to help ourselves. There are simple and easy things we can do that will have both immediate and long-term benefits for our health and personal happiness.

Happy reading...

A handwritten signature in pink ink that reads "Mary Kennedy". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in the same color as the text on the page.

Mary Kennedy

Live your life the best way you can!

Get moving... The benefits of regular physical activity are many; a brisk walk will melt away tension, ease aching muscles and joints, make you more alert. Over time it helps maintain a healthy weight, promotes good sleep, strengthens muscles and bones, and gives you a zest for life. Weight-bearing exercise helps prevent osteoporosis, keeps your heart muscles strong, lowers blood pressure, reducing risk of stroke and heart disease. The hidden benefit is time to yourself when you leave family, domestic and work worries behind.



Which type? Choose activities you enjoy and are more likely to keep up. Build three types of exercise into your routine and you will be on the way to all round fitness. Aerobic exercise strengthens the cardiovascular system and controls weight; strength or resistance exercise strengthens muscles, protects bones and joints. Stretching relaxes muscles that have been exercised, or are tight or in spasm as a result of bad posture or work-induced muscle strain. Why not take up dancing for instance?

How much? Take it slowly. If you've been a couch potato, it's wise to have a check-up with your doctor. Thirty minutes moderate activity every day keeps most adults fit. You don't need to join a gym or take up sport; you can achieve maximum heart health simply by walking (or an equivalent) three kilometres most days of the week. Never push your body too far. When exercising at a brisk pace (one that causes your heart to beat a little faster, makes you breath a little deeper and faster, brings out a little sweat on your brow) you should be able to talk easily. Always stop if you feel unwell or in pain.



Top three health concerns for women after the menopause

There are over 400,000 women in Ireland over 50 years of age and almost all have already gone through the menopause. This is a big time of change in a woman's life and whatever your experience, it is true for all women that after the menopause your body has changed and you need to think more carefully about health matters.

Here are the top three health concerns that all Irish women who have gone through the menopause should know about and the steps you should take to reduce your risk and prevent your likelihood of being unwell.

The menopause happens when your body decides that your reproductive life should be wound down. The ovaries which have produced an egg every month during your adult life stop working. The amount of the hormone oestrogen made by the ovary also drops and this results in menopausal symptoms.

Build your bones, don't lose them! Osteoporosis is a silent disease – a thinning and weakening of the bones. This increases the risk of fractures (usually the hip, wrist and spine) causing pain, disability, curvature of the spine and loss of height. Women are at greater risk than men because they have lower peak bone mass to begin with and have an increased rate of bone loss at and after the menopause. Some are at higher risk, for example, where there is family history, those who take long-term steroids, have low body weight or eating disorders or have recurrent diarrhoea.

If you are concerned you should talk to your doctor who should suggest a DEXA scan (a painless form of X-ray that you don't need to undress for) which shows if your bones have started to thin.

Often the first sign is if you break a bone after a minor fall, or you notice a loss of height. All post-menopausal women should speak to their doctor if they break a bone from a minor fall because a fracture implies osteoporosis unless proved otherwise. If you have had a fracture you are 2–5 times more likely to have another. This can be serious. Without wanting to frighten you, you should know that within a year of having a hip fracture, 50% of women become dependent on others to look after them and 20% die as a result of the fracture.

The good news is that there are a range of treatment options available from your doctor, that can either maintain bone, or actually rebuild bone, helping prevent further painful fractures.

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Over 33,000 women in Ireland over the age of 50 have suffered from at least one bone fracture since their 50th birthday as a result of a minor fall, according to new European research. This kind of fracture implies osteoporosis unless proven otherwise with a DEXA scan. If you had a fracture from a minor fall speak to your doctor immediately.

Four things you can do to avoid fractures associated with osteoporosis:

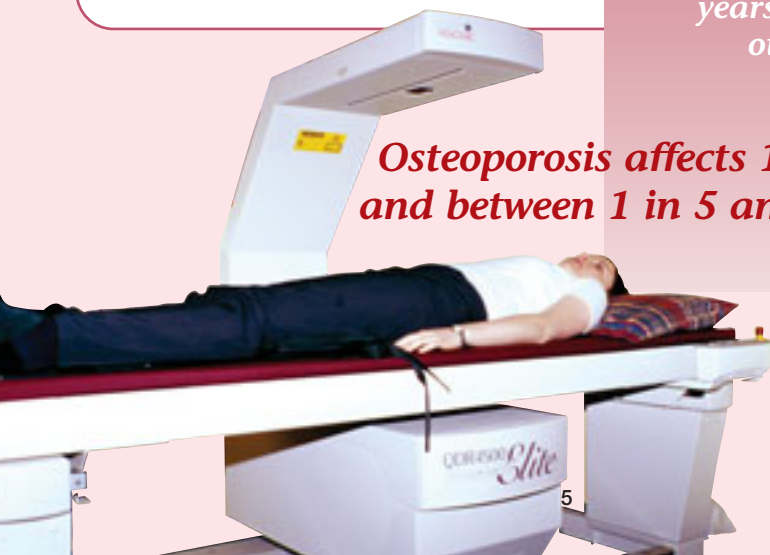
1. Eat a balanced diet.
2. Take regular weight-bearing exercise.
3. Take calcium and vitamin D.
4. If your doctor has prescribed a medication for osteoporosis, make sure you take it as directed.

According to the European study...

...we value our physical appearance and believe it affects confidence: 45% of women over 50 years of age interviewed said they fear developing the hunched look that comes from vertebral fractures but only 7% believe that strong bones are what keeps the body looking fit and strong. Only half had their weight and only a quarter had their height checked regularly - even though 20% reported they had lost height in the last five years. Yet measuring height, weight and age is one way to assess risk and identify those in need of a bone mineral density test.

Did you know that your bones develop more between the ages of 8-18 years than at any other time?

Osteoporosis affects 1 in 3 women and between 1 in 5 and 1 in 8 men.



continued overleaf

Cancer

One in three Irish people will develop cancer at some point in their lives. Due to earlier detection and better treatments, survival rates are improving all the time. Every woman should be breast aware – knowing what is normal for you so that you'll spot any changes.

After the age of 50, mammograms (breast X-rays) are sensible and in parts of the country these are offered free through the BreastCheck scheme. If you have a history of breast cancer in your family you should talk to your GP about regular check-ups and maybe its also time to discuss this with your daughters too?

The 5-point breast awareness code

1. Know what is normal for you.
2. Know what changes to look out for.
3. Look and feel for any changes.
4. Talk to your GP straight away if you find any changes.
5. Act by attending routine screening if you are aged 50-64 years.

The European Code Against Cancer recommends a number of steps you can take to reduce your risk of cancer, while contributing to a healthier lifestyle:

- If you smoke, make all efforts to quit.
- Moderate the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Increase your daily intake of fresh fruit and vegetables and eat a range of foods high in fibre.
- Maintain a healthy weight range. Increase your physical activity and limit your intake of fatty foods.
- Protect yourself from the sun and avoid sunburn.
- See your doctor if you notice a lump, a sore that does not heal, a mole that changes in shape, size or colour or any unusual bleeding.
- See your doctor if you have ongoing problems, such as a persistent cough or hoarseness, a change in bowel or bladder habits or an unexplained weight loss.

Love your heart!

Did you know that twice as many Irish people die from heart disease before the age of 65 in Ireland than the EU average?

You can do a lot to reduce your risk of developing heart disease:

- ♥ If you smoke give it up.
- ♥ Have regular health checks (especially for cholesterol and blood pressure levels).
- ♥ Learn to relax and reduce the level of stress in your life.
- ♥ Eat more fresh fruit and vegetables and less fatty foods and drink alcohol in moderation.
- ♥ Aerobic exercise strengthens your heart, lowers blood pressure, improves circulation.

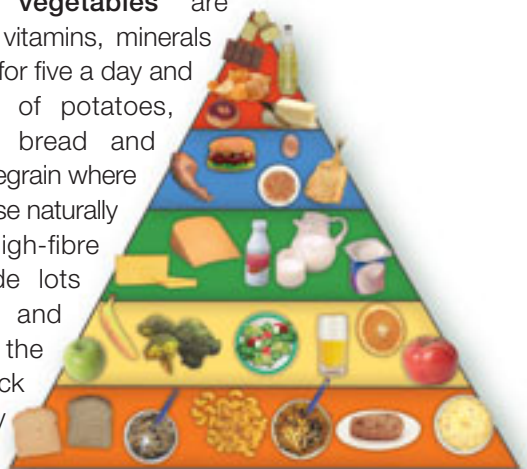
You are what you eat!

Food nourishes us and gives us pleasure; the key to healthy, happy eating is to eat a wide variety of foods in a balanced way. Sadly, an unbalanced diet will harm our bodies eventually. The results of our eating pattern and our failure to listen to all the healthy eating advice around us is the high levels of obesity, diabetes, stroke and heart disease we are all reading about in the papers now.

Eating more foods that promote good health will suppress your desire for foods that, in excess, damage your health.

Use the food pyramid (see below) to plan healthy, pleasurable food choices

- At the top are **high-fat foods**. Go easy on these and watch out for hidden fats in processed foods—biscuits, bars, fast foods and ready meals with high levels of saturated fats, salt, or sugar.
- Next are **high protein foods**. You need two helpings a day of meat, poultry, fish, or eggs, or peas and beans.
- **Dairy produce** keeps our bones strong. Try for three helpings of milk, cheese or yoghurt a day. If you have high cholesterol or are overweight, choose a low-fat version.
- **Fruit and vegetables** are packed with vitamins, minerals and fibre; try for five a day and six helpings of potatoes, pasta, rice, bread and cereals, wholegrain where possible. These naturally low-fat, high-fibre foods provide lots of energy and suppress the desire to snack on unhealthy foods.



For further information on any of the issues discussed in this booklet please talk to your GP or contact any of the following:



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European Institute of Women's Health

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Irish Cancer Society

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Action BreastCancer Helpline

Freefone 1800 30 90 40 (*weekdays 9am-5pm*)

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