

OSTEOPOROSIS (weak bones):

Osteopenia refers to bone density that is lower than normal peak density but not low enough to be classified as osteoporosis. Bone density is a measurement of how dense and strong the bones are. If a person's bone density is low compared to normal peak density, that person is said to have osteopenia. Having osteopenia means there is a greater risk that, as time passes, the individual may develop osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis refers to a bone density that is very low, compared to normal. As a result, the individual's bones become weak and may break from a minor fall or, in serious cases, even from simple actions, like sneezing or bumping into furniture.

Risk Factors: Today, more adults with intellectual disabilities are living in a community setting and their medical care originates in primary care physicians' offices. Primary care providers who treat individuals with intellectual disabilities must be aware of the special needs of this population. One important aspect of their physical health is that these individuals have an increased risk factors for osteoporosis and osteopenia and an increased prevalence of low bone density. These risks include, as applicable,

- treatment with anticonvulsant medications,
- decreased mobility,
- small stature,
- decreased muscle tone,
- post-menopausal status, and
- perhaps Downs Syndrome.

In some individuals with an intellectual disability very low Vitamin D levels have been found despite adequate nutrition.

Fractures and Falls: A history of fractures or falls may suggest the presence of osteopenia or osteoporosis because a consequence of osteoporosis is that the risk for fractures is much higher. Broken bones can cause pain and distress which may be poorly understood or managed, may challenge the individual to adjust to new routines or rehabilitation efforts, may limit mobility, and may complicate, at least during the healing period, participation in pleasant or integrative activities.

Ask the Doctor: While there has been much more attention given to this problem in recent years (e.g. Sally Field doing Boniva commercials), it is still under-diagnosed. Too often, the first clue is a broken bone or fractured hip. Thus, it is important for families and providers to be aware of the risk of osteopenia and osteoporosis. *If the individual you are taking to the doctor has any of the risk factors noted above you should ask the doctor about the risk of osteoporosis.*

Screening Test for Osteoporosis: The main screening test for osteoporosis is a bone mineral density (BMD) test. This is a painless, noninvasive method of measuring bone mass. A BMD test can detect osteoporosis before a fracture occurs and can estimate an individual's risk of having a fracture in the future.