

PATIENT GUIDE TO OSTEOPOROSIS OF THE SPINE

DESCRIPTION

Osteoporosis most commonly occurs in older women, and is a result of the loss of bone mineral density, which weakens normal bone. Osteoporotic fracture typically occurs in the wrists, spine and hips. The loss of bone strength, particularly in the elderly, can lead to spine fractures following minimal trauma. These fractures can be very painful and disabling. Vertebral osteoporotic fracture often heal in a position that may lead to increasing curvature of the spine (kyphosis).

SYMPTOMS

Sudden onset of sharp back pains brought on by fractured bone.

Loss of height.

Abnormal curvature of spine.

CAUSES

Loss of calcium or lack of vitamin D.

Women susceptible after menopause.

Mild trauma.

Age.

Family history.

POSSIBLE TREATMENT OPTIONS

Non Operative Treatment.

Medications are sometimes needed to alleviate pain. Long term medication is needed to maintain or improve bone mineral density (strength).

There are currently no surgical treatment options to treat osteoporosis. However, several options are available to treat the vertebral osteoporotic fracture.

The least invasive option is percutaneous vertebroplasty, whereby a needle is introduced to the fractured vertebral body so that a special cement can be delivered into the fracture site to stabilize it. This is done as a day care procedure under local anaesthesia.

In cases where the osteoporotic fracture causes significant deformity or neural compression (paralysis), then surgical decompression and correction of deformity is indicated. The safest option is to perform a posterior subtraction surgery with spinal stabilisation. This is a single stage posterior spinal surgery to decompress the spinal cord, correct the spinal deformity and to provide stability to the spine.