Osteoporosis, or porous bone, is a disease that causes bones to become weak, brittle, and susceptible to fracture, even from a minor fall or bump. It occurs when a person loses too much bone, makes too little bone, or both. Approximately 54 million Americans have osteoporosis and low bone mass, placing them at increased risk for osteoporosis, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

Risk factors

Many risk factors for osteoporosis are uncontrollable. These include:

- Being over age 50
- Being female
- Menopause
- Family history of osteoporosis
- Low body weight
- Being small/thin
- Having had a bone fracture or height loss

Other risk factors, however, are controllable. These include:

- Not getting an adequate amount of calcium and vitamin D
- Not consuming enough fruits and vegetables
- Getting too much protein, sodium, and caffeine
- Living a sedentary lifestyle
- Smoking
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Losing weight

Additionally, there are some medications and medical conditions that can increase risk of osteoporosis.

Prevention

Fortunately, there are steps you can take toward keeping your bones healthy and strong. Consider the following recommendations from the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

- Get enough calcium and vitamin D
- Eat a well-balanced diet, including fruits and vegetables
- Engage in regular exercise
- Avoid smoking
- Limit alcohol to 2-3 drinks per day

Detection

A physician diagnoses osteoporosis based on a medical evaluation that generally includes medical history; physical examination; bone density test; and laboratory tests that can help identify the cause of bone loss.

For additional information on the risk factors, prevention, and treatment of osteoporosis, contact a medical health professional.