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Living with Osteoporosis

By Tyler Dyck

Fatima stubbed her toe on the first day of her Muscat holiday and hobbled around for a week before finding out from an X-ray she'd broken her foot. When she asked the doctor how she could possibly have fractured a bone with such a light tap, her physician had a one-word response: osteoporosis. If, like Fatima, you are a woman over the age of 50, you, too, stand a good chance of having osteoporosis.

In fact, one in four women and one in eight men who are in their sixth decade of life have already developed the degenerative bone condition that can put them at risk of debilitating fractures, disfigurement, and associated health problems.

Like so many of diseases that sneak up on people as they age, osteoporosis typically develops without producing any symptoms until a fracture occurs, often not requiring a major blow to the bone. The hips, wrist, and spine are where many of these telltale osteoporotic fractures occur.

Research has shown that while humans tend to "build bone" during their first three decades, after age thirty the process of bone "resorption" by the body starts to outpace the process by which new bone is formed. The key to curbing rates of osteoporosis in the Middle East is prevention, and specialists recommend a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D, but low in caffeine and salt. Most of all, regular weight bearing exercise like walking, jogging, or lifting weights is essential for stimulating bone development. Drinking plenty of water, stopping smoking, and taking calcium supplements can also play a part in countering the degenerative disease.

Whether you've been diagnosed with osteoporosis on the basis of bone-density tests, or have had a break believed to be linked to porous, osteoporotic bones, your physiotherapist can help you fight back. If your major joints aren't functioning to their full capacity, they can put stress on your other structures. With time, wear and tear in these joints will put too much force on the bones leading to minor cracks, and even full-blown fractures. By making sure your joints are working properly, physiotherapy can help you keep broken bones at bay.

If you've had a break, physiotherapy can help alleviate pain around the site of the fracture or, in the case of the spine, around the area of vertebral collapse. It can also calm down muscle spasm to reduce the strain on the bone as it heals. Once the

fracture is stable, a physiotherapist can help strengthen supporting muscles to prevent re-fracture or new breaks in the area.

One of the biggest mistakes people make after breaking a bone, or learning they have osteoporosis, is to cut back their exercise regimens, fearing more fractures. In fact, exercise is critical to building and maintaining bone strength. A physiotherapist can help tailor an exercise, strength, and stretching program that is suited to the individual: something he or she can commit to over the long-term. A diagnosis of osteoporosis can seem like the beginning of the end and more often than not, delivers a blow to a person's self esteem. It doesn't have to. With proper diet and a suitable exercise program, you can live a long, active, and healthy life. Good luck (but don't break a leg!).

For further information on this topic please contact the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) in Hawally at 264-2862, or check out our website at www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com

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