



**National Institutes of Health  
Osteoporosis and Related  
Bone Diseases ~  
National Resource Center**

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## *For People With Osteoporosis* **How to Find a Doctor**

*Isabel Johnson, age 64, picked up a brochure on osteoporosis at her local pharmacy. What she read about the "silent disease" concerned her. She learned that she had several of the risk factors: she had gone through menopause at an early age, and her mother had suffered several fractures in her seventies and eighties.*

*Isabel called her neighbor, a registered nurse, who suggested that she discuss her concerns with a doctor. Isabel wondered how to find a doctor with expertise in osteoporosis.*

For many people, finding a doctor who is knowledgeable about osteoporosis can be difficult. There is no physician specialty dedicated solely to osteoporosis, nor is there a certification program for health professionals who treat the disease. A variety of medical specialists treat people with osteoporosis, including internists, gynecologists, family physicians, endocrinologists, rheumatologists, physiatrists, orthopaedists, and geriatricians.

There are a number of ways to find a doctor who treats osteoporosis patients. If you have a primary care physician or a family doctor, discuss your concerns with him or her. Your doctor may treat the disease or be able to refer you to an osteoporosis specialist.

If you are enrolled in an HMO or managed care health plan, consult your assigned physician about osteoporosis. This doctor should be able to give you an appropriate referral.

If you do not have a personal physician or your doctor cannot help, you should contact your nearest university hospital or academic health center and ask for the department that cares for patients with osteoporosis. The department will vary from institution to institution. For

example, in some facilities, the department of endocrinology or metabolic bone disease treats osteoporosis patients. In other medical centers, the appropriate department may be rheumatology, orthopedics, or gynecology. Some hospitals have a separate osteoporosis program or women's clinic that treats osteoporosis patients.

Once you have identified a doctor, you may wish to ask whether the physician has specialized training in osteoporosis, how much of the practice is dedicated to osteoporosis, and whether he or she uses bone mass measurement.

Your own primary care doctor – whether an internist, orthopaedist, or gynecologist – is often the best person to treat you because she or he knows your medical history, your lifestyle, and your special needs.

## **Medical Specialists Who Treat Osteoporosis**

After an initial assessment, it may be necessary to see an endocrinologist, a rheumatologist, or another specialist to exclude the possibility of an underlying disease that may contribute to osteoporosis:

**Endocrinologists** treat the endocrine system, which comprises the glands and hormones that help control the body's metabolic activity. In addition to osteoporosis, endocrinologists also treat diabetes and diseases of the thyroid and pituitary glands.

**Rheumatologists** diagnose and treat diseases of the joints, muscles, bones, and tendons, including arthritis and collagen diseases.

**Family physicians** have a broad range of training that includes internal medicine, gynecology, and pediatrics. They place special emphasis on caring for an individual or family on a long-term, continuing basis.

**Geriatricians** are family physicians or internists who have received additional training on the aging process and the conditions and diseases that often occur among the elderly, including incontinence, falls, and dementia. Geriatricians often care for patients in nursing homes, the patient's home, or in office or hospital settings.

**Gynecologists** diagnose and treat conditions of the female reproductive system and associated disorders. They often serve as primary care physicians for women and follow their patients' reproductive health over time.

**Internists** are trained in general internal medicine. Internists diagnose and treat many diseases of the body. They provide long-term comprehensive care in the hospital and office, have expertise in many areas, and often act as consultants to other specialists.

**Orthopaedic surgeons** are physicians trained in the care of patients with musculoskeletal problems. Congenital skeletal malformations, bone fractures and infections, and metabolic problems are some of the conditions addressed by orthopaedists.

**Physiatrists** are physicians who specialize in physical medicine and rehabilitation. Physiatrists evaluate and treat patients with impairments, disabilities, or pain arising from various medical problems, including bone fractures. Physiatrists focus on restoring the physical, psychological, social, and vocational functioning of the individual.

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