



Associated conditions

Osteoporosis

What is it?

Osteoporosis is a condition where the body's bones become thin and more likely to break. It is diagnosed by looking at bone mineral density (BMD) which is a measure of the strength of your bones. People with osteoporosis have a low BMD.

Osteopenia is a condition where BMD is lower than normal, but not as low as in osteoporosis.

Am I at risk?

People tend to have a lower BMD when they are first diagnosed with coeliac disease. This is because most people are diagnosed long after they reach their peak BMD in their mid twenties. Having gut damage for a long time before diagnosis means that you may not have been absorbing calcium properly for some time. This puts you more at risk of having a low BMD.

If you are diagnosed with coeliac disease in your childhood or teens and follow a gluten-free diet, your long term bone health is likely to be unaffected.

Your BMD will usually improve after starting the gluten-free diet. Women diagnosed with coeliac disease after the menopause find it more difficult to improve BMD.

You are more at risk of osteoporosis as you get older and this risk increases if you have a low body weight or you smoke.

Should I be tested?

Osteoporosis is diagnosed by a bone scan, known as a Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) scan, which

measures your BMD. At diagnosis and follow up, the decision for recommendations on DEXA scanning should be carried out on an individual basis, based on assessment from your local healthcare professional. You should speak with your local GP or consultant about your case.

How is it treated?

Following a healthy balanced gluten-free diet that is rich in calcium is important to help keep your bones healthy.

People with coeliac disease have an increased need for calcium compared to the general adult population. It is recommended that adults with coeliac disease have at least 1000 milligrams (mg) of calcium each day. You can use the table overleaf to find good sources of calcium that are gluten-free.

How to minimise the risks?

There are many factors that affect your risk of osteoporosis; having a healthy active lifestyle can really help. For people with coeliac disease the most important factor is following a gluten-free diet. This will allow your gut to heal and improve your absorption of calcium.

Other ways to help include:

- regular weight bearing exercise, such as jogging, walking, gardening and dancing
- not/stopping smoking
- avoiding excessive alcohol intake.



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What are good sources of calcium?

Food per serving	Amount
Skimmed milk, 200ml	248mg
Semi skimmed milk, 200ml	244mg
Calcium enriched milk alternative eg soya/almond milk*, 200ml	240mg
Tinned sardines with bones, ½ can drained (42g)	230mg
Cheddar cheese, 30g	220mg
Canned rice pudding*, ½ can (200g)	176mg
Sesame seeds, 2 teaspoons	170mg
Pot of yoghurt*, 125g	170mg
Fromage frais*, 2 x 47g pots	140mg
Pot of soya yoghurt*, 100g	120mg
Kale, 3 tablespoons (80g)	120mg
Baked beans*, ½ tin	105mg
Kidney beans, 120g	85mg
Dried figs, 30g	75mg
1 orange	70mg
Almonds, 30g	70mg
Gluten-free bread*, 2 slices	70mg
Broccoli, 3 tablespoons (80g)	32mg
Dried apricots, 30g	30mg

***Check your Food and Drink Directory for suitable products.**

This information is for guidance only and should not replace advice given by your healthcare professional.

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To absorb enough calcium your body also needs vitamin D. Most people absorb enough vitamin D from exposing their skin to sunlight. However, some people are recommended to take vitamin D supplements:

- infants
- pregnant and breastfeeding women
- those over 65
- people with darker skin
- those not exposed to much sunlight.

Good food sources of vitamin D are oily fish, eggs and margarine.

If you can't get all the calcium you need from your diet you may need a calcium supplement; some are combined with vitamin D. Speak to your healthcare professional for advice.

Your consultant will advise you if you need medication to lower the risk of breaking your bones in the future.

Following a healthy balanced gluten-free diet that is rich in calcium is important to help keep your bones healthy.

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