

Weekend Doctor

By **DR. THOMAS F. VAIL**

Unexplained foot fractures may be the first sign of osteoporosis, a bone-thinning disease that affects over 28 million Americans and accounts for 1.5 million bone fractures a year.

Osteoporosis is frequently referred to as the “silent crippler” since it often progresses without any symptoms or isn’t diagnosed until a person experiences pain from a bone fracture.

The porous nature of bones in people with osteoporosis makes them more susceptible to bone fractures, especially in the feet.

Because the bones are in a weakened state, normal, weight-bearing actions like walking can cause the bones in the feet to break.

In fact, many patients visit their foot and ankle surgeon suffering from foot pain only to find out they actually have a stress fracture without having experienced an injury.

While osteoporosis is most commonly seen in women over age 50, younger people and men are also affected.

Early symptoms can include increased pain with walking accompanied by redness and swelling on the top of the foot.

Often times, patients don’t seek treatment for their symptoms for weeks or even months, thinking the pain will pass.

The best advice is don’t ignore foot pain of any type.

Early intervention can make all the difference in your treatment and recovery.

Foot and ankle surgeons are able to diagnose osteoporosis through bone densitometry tests, which measure calcium and mineral levels in the bones through low-dose radiation X-ray, or possibly through a routine X-ray.

This is why prevention and early intervention are key.

Women should make sure bone densitometry tests are part of their wellness examinations when indicated by their physicians.

If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis, it’s important to protect your feet from stress fractures.

Wear shoes that provide support and cushioning, such as athletic running shoes, to provide extra shock absorption and protection.

Custom orthotics may also be recommended to protect the foot from pressure and provide shock absorption, particularly during exercise.

Remember that “custom orthotics” are not the same as the “custom fitted” pairs you can buy at your mass retailers today.

Custom orthotics are handmade, individualized orthotics made to a doctor’s specifications from a three-dimensional scan or mold of your feet.

Don’t be fooled by the “custom fitted” orthotics that are selected after you step on a pressure pad and it places your order. They are packaged and sent to you from a distribution center.

If you are suffering from foot pain or suspect you may have osteoporosis, call your podiatrist for an evaluation.



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