

Belly Fat Linked to Low Vitamin D Levels, Indirect Factor causing Osteoporosis

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Latest research links higher levels of belly fat, obesity, to lower vitamin D levels.

Low levels of vitamin D contribute to osteoporosis, which affects every three out of four women in India; symptoms are not always clear.

Over 30% Pune women between 15 and 49 years of age are obese with higher risk of osteoporosis; Menopause post 50 also an important risk factor

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Obese people are more at risk of osteoporosis. A recent research has further confirmed the association between belly fat and lower 

levels of Vitamin D. Lower vitamin D levels have been traditionally associated with osteoporosis which is majorly prevalent in women.

National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-2016) reports suggest that over 30% of urban women in Pune, between the age of 15 and 49 years are suffering from obesity, which is proven to be a significant risk factor for osteoporosis. Post 50 years of age, most women have menopause, which is another risk factor

for the bone ailment.

“As per the study, the larger the waistline the higher is the risk of vitamin D deficiency. Both higher levels of total and abdominal fat had a direct relation to lower levels of vitamin D. This can directly lead to osteoporosis, which is a major health problem in women in India. The disease manifests with sudden fractures or bone pains,” says Dr. Sinukumar Bhaskaran, Consultant - Orthopedics and Joint Replacement Surgery, Columbia Asia Hospital, Pune.

About 80 per cent women in India, i.e. more than three out of four women suffer from osteoporosis and menopausal women above the age of 50 are more at risk. Women with low or no exposure to sunlight may be more prone to bone diseases than those who are outdoors, as lack of Vitamin D may lead to osteoporosis, a disease that affects the structure of bone and reduces bone mass.

The main symptoms of osteoporosis are backache, pain in wrist and knee, inability to walk straight or leaning forward, and fracture. Inadequate intake of vitamin D due to lack of exposure to sun leads to poor calcium absorption in women and is one of the main reasons for high incidence of osteoporosis in India. Vitamin D helps the body to absorb calcium from dietary and supplementary sources and enough calcium and vitamin D throughout life help maintain healthy bone density. Other reasons of osteoporosis are early menopause, increasing longevity, inadequate diet, genetic vulnerability towards infection, late diagnosis of the disease, and poor knowledge of bone health.

“Bones are made from living tissue and the body continues to perform ‘bone turnover’, the process of replacing old bone with new bone, until the age of 30. After 30, the production of new bones decreases and we lose more bone after 50. In women, this is the menopausal phase where a lower level of estrogen makes the bones less dense than before. The risk of fractures and breaking bones increases in women who are small or thin,” Dr. Sinukumar says.

Osteoporosis further risks those who smoke and consume alcohol. A healthy calcium-rich diet including curd, milk, paneer, and egg, maintaining an active lifestyle, abstaining from smoking, and limiting intake of alcohol may help in delaying the onset of osteoporosis in both men and women. Including apple, coconut oil, and pineapple in regular diet is also considered beneficial for bone health. According to estimates, about 2.5 crore people in India suffer from osteoporosis and osteoarthritis; this number could reach 3.6 crore in coming years. Every year, osteoporosis causes about 15 lakh fractures.

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