Osteoporosis (OP) is a bone disease. The word “osteoporosis” literally means porous bones. It is a disorder characterized by decreased bone strength as a result of reduced bone quantity and/or quality. A person with OP has an increased risk of breaking a bone (fracturing). These breaks are called fragility fractures to indicate that the bone has become more fragile (weaker).

OP is called “the silent thief” because it can progress without symptoms until a broken bone occurs. These changes may restrict one’s ability to do some physical activities.

OA most often affects the spine, hips, knees, feet or fingers. The symptoms may include pain and/or stiffness after use. Resting the affected joint often helps reduce the pain but short periods of inactivity may follow a period of inactivity. Over time, the pain may get worse but this does not happen to everyone or at each area where you have OA. Regular X-rays can be done to help determine how much damage has occurred in the joint(s) but treatment is usually based on how you feel rather than how the X-rays look.
**Risk Factors**

Low bone mineral density is a risk factor for fracture, which is the main consequence of OP. Other key risk factors include older age, being female*, having had a prior fragility fracture and taking certain medications such as corticosteroids (e.g., prednisone). Smoking, alcohol, rheumatoid arthritis and having a parent who had a hip fracture all increase a person’s fracture risk.

The risk of developing OP and fragility fractures can be reduced with lifestyle changes and, when needed, the use of prescription medication. Vitamin D supplementation, a well balanced diet with adequate calcium and protein, and regular exercise are important lifestyle changes that help keep bones healthy and strong by reducing falls and fractures. Broken hips caused by OP often need to be repaired surgically. (Contact OC for the Diagnosis fact sheet.)

Some factors that can contribute to the development of osteoarthritis include family history, physical inactivity, excess weight and overuse or injury of joints.

OA can be managed by balancing gentle or low impact exercises with rest and by protecting the joint from specific activities (e.g., climbing stairs for the knees). Weight control and pain relief medication are also effective. Severe OA may be treated with an operation where the damaged joint is replaced with an artificial one. Knee and hip joint replacements are commonly performed in those with severe OA.

*At least 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men will suffer an osteoporotic fracture in their lifetime.