

# Understanding osteoporosis risk factors key to maintaining healthy bones: new report

## Sally Pearson, OAM, urging Aussies to “know your bones” this World Osteoporosis Day 2023

Dual World and Olympic champion hurdler, Sally Pearson, OAM, is teaming with doctors, patients, and politicians today (Thursday, October 19), to release key findings from Healthy Bones Australia’s ‘*Know Your Bones Community Risk Report*’ Third Edition, 2023 at a Parliamentary Friends of Aged Care event in Parliament House, Canberra.

The Healthy Bones ambassador who clipped a hurdle and shattered her wrist at an international athletics meet in Italy 2015, is urging Australian adults to “know your bones” today, prior to World Osteoporosis Day (Friday, October 20).

The new report summarises data from more than 104,000 Australians who have completed the *Know Your Bones* online self-assessment tool, developed by Healthy Bones Australia in partnership with the Garvan Institute of Medical Research, to help Australians understand their potential risk for developing osteoporosis, and bone breaks. The test provides personalised recommendations about bone health, which they can share with their GP for further discussion.

According to Healthy Bones Australia Chair, Endocrinologist, and Head of the Department of Medicine, School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health, Professor Peter Ebeling, AO, FAHMS, Melbourne, the report reveals significant under-investigation and inadequate treatment in those at risk of osteoporosis.

“The report is showing gaps in care, with one-in-two (52 per cent) adults who reported a bone fracture, yet to undergo a bone mineral density (BMD) test to investigate their bone health.<sup>1</sup>”

“Of those respondents who reported a fracture, 87 per cent are not taking osteoporosis medication, while the vast majority have lifestyle risk factors,” said Prof Ebeling.<sup>1</sup>”

Sally was shocked by the difficult recovery process from her shattered wrist in 2015, which significantly compromised her mobility, independence, and mental wellbeing.

“The rehabilitation process was more traumatic than the actual fracture. Thankfully, because my bones were generally quite strong, I was able to mount a successful recovery from my injury, and to win my second World Championship in 2017,” Sally said.

“This is not the case however, for many Australians living with osteoporosis. We know that too many people are suffering unnecessarily from broken bones that could have been prevented.

“Based on my personal experience with fractures, I know how important it is to look after your bones,” said Sally.

The new report calls for earlier investigation of bone health through BMD testing, and greater emphasis on medical intervention to reduce the impact of preventable fractures. It further urges Aussie adults to lead a bone-healthy lifestyle to minimise their risk of developing osteoporosis.

CEO of Healthy Bones Australia, Mr Greg Lyubomirsky, Sydney, said our goal is to improve the diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis, to reduce the impact of preventable fractures.

“We are pleased so many Australians are using this self-assessment, which represents a simple first step to checking bone health. However, we need to close this gap between identifying risk factors, and taking action.

“Our goal is to improve the diagnosis of osteoporosis, and advocate for early intervention to reduce the impact of preventable fractures,”<sup>1</sup> Mr Lyubomirsky said.

"Concerningly, our 2023 report reveals half of all fractures are occurring in adults aged 50-69 years, and nearly a quarter of respondents over 70 years (24 per cent) with clinical risk factors for osteoporosis, have not undergone a BMD test.<sup>1</sup>

"More than one-third of respondents reported a clinical risk factor (36 per cent), yet only half (52 per cent) reported having a BMD test,"<sup>1</sup> said Mr Lyubomirsky.

"The report also confirms lifestyle risk factors are common, and addressing inadequate calcium and vitamin D levels, lack of exercise and smoking, excessive alcohol intake, are important for supporting bone health."<sup>1-2</sup>

Healthy Bones Australia Medical Committee Deputy Chair and Specialist Endocrinologist at St Vincent's Hospital, Dr Weiwen Chen, Sydney said "Fractures from poor bone health can severely disrupt life and mobility. Those affected are often unable to work, drive, shop, or perform simple household tasks. Any fracture is serious, and sustaining a first fracture can double your risk of re-fracture.<sup>3</sup>

"We need to improve investigation rates for those living with risk factors for poor bone health, or those who have already broken a bone, particularly given BMD testing is widely available, and reimbursed via Medicare for many risk factors, and for those aged 70 years or over.

"Effective treatment options are also available in Australia to reduce fracture risk," Dr Chen said.

"We encourage GPs working at the frontline of osteoporosis care to utilise these tools to capture at-risk consumers and manage osteoporosis,"

Carole, 69, Central Coast, NSW, has sustained, and been hospitalised with multiple fractures to her spine, wrist, and ribs over the past 10 years. A late diagnosis led to a complicated and painful journey for Carole.

In 2015, whilst emptying a garden drain, Carole was startled by a lizard that jumped onto her shoulder. She jolted in response. This small event had serious consequences. After visiting multiple specialists and making several hospital visits, Carole eventually learned she had fractured her spine, and spent the next three months in hospital, regaining mobility,

"I had to learn to walk again. I've also lost height due to the damage I sustained to my lower spine.

"My life has changed dramatically because of the fractures I've sustained. My bones must be monitored very closely now. My medication has helped me, but I take care when performing simple, everyday tasks," said Carole.

"That's why it's essential that bone health becomes a higher priority for doctors, and the community so people are diagnosed early, and able to avoid painful fractures."

**In advance of World Osteoporosis Day, Sally is urging Australians to prioritise their bone health by taking the *Know Your Bones* online self-assessment today.**

#### **Key 'Know Your Bones Community Risk Report' findings :**

- More than one in two (52 per cent) of the respondents who reported a broken bone were aged between 50-69 years<sup>1</sup>;
- 87 per cent of respondents who had broken a bone were not on osteoporosis medication;<sup>1</sup>
- Of the respondents aged 70+ who had fractured a bone, nearly 80 per cent were not on osteoporosis medication<sup>1</sup>;
- More than half (52 per cent) who reported a bone fracture or clinical risk factor, had not undergone a BMD test<sup>1</sup>; and
- Almost 40 per cent of those with a reported clinical risk factor, and the vast majority (99 per cent) cited having a lifestyle risk factor.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Community Risk Report calls for :**

- Increased investigation of identified risk factors for osteoporosis, using BMD testing<sup>1</sup>;
- Early diagnosis to reduce fracture risk, and timely medical intervention following a broken bone<sup>1</sup>;
- Greater community engagement with the 'Know Your Bones' tool to increase awareness of risk factors, recommended treatments, and preventative strategies<sup>1</sup>; and
- Improved lifestyle factors to support bone health, including adequate calcium, vitamin D, exercise and reducing tobacco/alcohol use.<sup>1-2</sup>

## About osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a painless disease leading to reduced bone strength and increased risk of fracture. Once a fracture occurs, action must be taken to protect bone health, and bone density monitored to gauge improvement. Importantly, osteoporosis and osteopenia affect women and men (who account for up to 30 per cent of all fractures relating to osteoporosis and osteopenia, and their associated costs).<sup>4</sup>

Fractures are expensive to treat and disruptive to the lives of patients, and their families. Data shows 66 per cent of Australians aged 50+ are living with poor bone health (osteoporosis or osteopenia). Fractures cost \$2.59 billion per annum, and account for up to 70 per cent of the overall cost of the disease.<sup>4</sup>

## About Healthy Bones Australia

Healthy Bones Australia (formerly Osteoporosis Australia) is a national, not-for-profit organisation that focuses on reducing broken bones and improving bone health across Australia. The organisation was established in 2001 in response to the growing number of Australians living with poor bone health, and the lack of health focus on preventing osteoporosis. Healthy Bones Australia aims to increase community and health professional awareness of osteoporosis, and advocates to government to reduce the impact of the disease, nation-wide.

To learn more, or to take the *Know Your Bones* self-assessment, head to: [www.knowyourbones.org.au](http://www.knowyourbones.org.au).

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## References

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