

## Marilyn, 66

### Graphic designer & classic car enthusiast diagnosed with osteoporosis after falling & fracturing her arm last year, SYDNEY

Graphic designer and classic car enthusiast, Marilyn, 66, Sydney, was 65 years of age when diagnosed with osteoporosis – a disease that causes bones to become thin, weak and fragile, often resulting in a fracture.<sup>1</sup>

In December 2020, while preparing for a backyard Christmas party, Marilyn tripped over some netting designed to prevent the bush turkeys from entering her garden, and fell. Her arm landed hard on an outdoor table.

Her husband rushed Marilyn to the emergency department of their local hospital, where doctors confirmed she had fractured her arm.

Four months later, Marilyn received a call from the hospital's Osteoporosis Refracture Prevention Clinic, advising she had risk factors for poor bone health that required further investigation. A bone mineral density (BMD) test and several scans confirmed she was living with severe osteoporosis.

Marilyn was left in shock, given she was in good health, and up until then, had no knowledge of being at risk osteoporosis.

Today, Marilyn takes preventative osteoporosis medication and exercises regularly to manage her disease. She has also altered her diet to ensure she “feeds her bones”.

Marilyn is passionate about sharing her story on World Osteoporosis Day to help raise community awareness of this common disease that is often only diagnosed following a fracture. She encourages all Australians to “Know Your Bones” by completing Healthy Bones Australia's online self-risk assessment.

#### **This is Marilyn's story.**

Four months after surgery to repair her broken arm, Marilyn received a call from the local hospital's Osteoporosis Refracture Prevention Clinic, advising she undergo further tests for osteoporosis.

“They explained I had a couple of risk factors for osteoporosis, and suggested I undergo a bone mineral density test and other scans to determine my risk of future fracture, and osteoporosis,” said Marilyn.

Having led a healthy lifestyle up until then, and with no known family history of the disease, Marilyn was shocked when her doctor diagnosed her with severe osteoporosis at the age of 65.

“I never expected I had anything wrong with me. In fact, I didn't even know I was at risk of osteoporosis.

“So, when I looked at my test results stating I was ‘off the scale’, I was extremely upset,” Marilyn said.

“Like many other Australians, I mistakenly thought osteoporosis was a disease of older people, seen in those with a severely hunched spine.”



Marilyn is now more informed about her bone health and recognises there were earlier warning signs which should have been investigated, although osteoporosis was never mentioned.

"In 2013, a routine pathology test revealed I had a vitamin D deficiency, so I was advised by my doctor to get more sun and take a vitamin D supplement.

"However, working long hours indoors and being extremely conscious of always covering up and wearing sunscreen were hard habits to break. Although I took vitamin D supplements for some months, I ultimately discontinued taking them and ignored the health warning," said Marilyn.

"Between 2015 and 2017, I developed several stress fractures in my feet from exercise, for which I was required to wear a moon boot at the time.

"In August 2019, I also developed severe pain around my pelvis, which I dismissed as bad back pain at the time. However, my scans at the Osteoporosis Refracture Prevention Clinic later revealed that I had fractured my sacrum, which had not been previously identified," Marilyn said.

Marilyn maintains an earlier diagnosis of osteoporosis could have prevented many of the fractures she endured, and the severity of the disease with which she now contends.

Following her diagnosis with osteoporosis, Marilyn was prescribed medication immediately to manage her disease and was recommended several specially targeted exercise programs.

"I was also advised to adjust my diet and was given a long list of foods I should and shouldn't eat to best 'feed my bones', to prevent further calcium reabsorption and manage my osteoporosis," said Marilyn.

Today, Marilyn is very appreciative for all of the invaluable advice she has received from professionals who have helped her post- diagnosis, and maintains a positive attitude toward managing her disease.

She frequently visits the Healthy Bones Australia website, and considers it a valuable resource for information on managing osteoporosis, including treatment, supplements, diet and exercise.

She is passionate about sharing her story, in a bid to help others recognise the warning signs of osteoporosis, and to proactively assess their bone health.

"I hope that by sharing my story, I can help more people become aware of osteoporosis and the early warning signs.

"I encourage all Australians aged over 50 years to jump online and complete the 'Know Your Bones' self-assessment, so they can understand their risk factors for poor bone health, and potentially obtain an earlier diagnosis of osteoporosis," Marilyn said.

"This World Osteoporosis Day, we need to focus on protecting our bones and prevention."

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## Reference

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Osteoporosis. 2020 [October 2021]; Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/chronic-musculoskeletal-conditions/osteoporosis/contents/what-is-osteoporosis>.