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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Diagnosing Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition in which your bones can progressively weaken. Eventually, they can break (fracture) with very little impact or trauma. The wrist, hip, and spine are the most commonly affected parts of the skeleton. Most people do not know that they have osteoporosis until one of their bones finally break. This is because osteoporosis causes absolutely no pain until a fracture actually occurs. Therefore, the best cure for osteoporosis is prevention and early detection.

The best-known way of identifying the early stages of osteoporosis in its early form is a test using x-rays called dual energy x-ray absorbtiometry (this is commonly called a "DXA SCAN"). At the moment, this method of bone density testing is the most accurate and reliable. Using a low dose of radiation, a "DXA scan" of the lower spine (lumbar) and/or one hip is done. These areas are chosen because they are the two main areas at risk from osteoporotic fractures. Unfortunately, a DXA scan of the hip and spine is relatively expensive procedure that uses a large, immobile, and very pricey piece of equipment.

Recently, a more portable and much less expensive method of determining bone density has been developed. It uses "ultrasound" instead of radiation. Now, new technology can use "ULTRASOUND" to measure the density of wrist or heel bones in your body. Ultrasound is really just extremely high frequency sound waves that are inaudible to the human ear. The echoes of the reflected sound waves can be used to create an electronic image or measurement of the internal area being examined. It does not require radiation like an x-ray or DXA scan. By measuring the density or strength of the wrist or heel bones, the bone density of the rest of the skeleton can be concluded. For example, if the bone density of your heel bone were found to be low, you would have a higher risk of a fracture in other areas such as your spine or hip. If you are diagnosed as having an abnormally low bone density by ultrasound, researchers still recommend you then have a DXA scan done to further confirm the results.

As of now, the ultrasound scanner does not replace the DXA scan. However, the ultrasound equipment will likely become easily accessible to the general public and will

be much more useful for screening for early signs of osteoporosis. In fact, I am predicting that you may even have access to it in the personal offices of some health care practitioners, rather than in cash-strapped hospitals.