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Loss of Height can Indicate Osteoporosis

Did you know that the loss of two or more inches in height in elderly women serves as a powerful predictor of osteoporosis in the hip, and thus the risk for hip fractures? The findings in a new study at The Ohio State University Medical Center has led researchers to recommend that primary care physicians routinely screen aging patients for "loss of height".

The author of the study points out that a fracture of the hip caused by osteoporosis should be preventable. Monitoring of changes in height by primary care physicians could indicate the need for bone density testing at a much earlier stage in the progression of osteoporosis.

The results of the study showed that height loss of between two and three inches increased more than fourfold the chances the women had osteoporosis of the hip (verified by bone density testing). The odds of osteoporosis in the hip were nearly ten times greater in women with three or more inches of height loss compared to women with less than an inch of loss. The average age of the women in the study was sixty. All were post-menopausal, when the lack of estrogen production can lead to dramatic bone loss.

Osteoporosis is often called a "silent disease" because most patients feel no pain or symptoms and it is often not diagnosed until a fracture has occurred. An estimated 30 million American women either have or are at risk for osteoporosis, which is responsible for about 300,000 hip fractures annually. Men account for 25 percent of the hip fractures nationally.

Broken hips can be catastrophic for elderly patients – nearly 50 percent of sufferers never return to normal function, 25 percent require nursing home care and 20 percent die of infection, blood clots or other complications within six months after the fractures.

In the future, bone density screening may become as routine as mammogram for women who have reached menopause. Until that happens, monitoring height should be a part of every checkup after the age of 50.