

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

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Fragility Fractures

A patient's guide



What is a fragility fracture?

A fragility fracture is a break in the bone resulting from a fall from standing height or less. In the majority of people, a fall of this kind should not result in a broken bone. A fragility fracture is often an indicator that there is an underlying weakness of the bones, known as osteoporosis.

Why does this happen?

There are a number of reasons why bones can weaken as you get older. These include chronic diseases affecting your lungs, bowels and kidneys, and certain medications such as steroids. Being underweight, smoking and alcohol can contribute. If you have gone through the menopause, your bones will be more fragile and may break more easily.

What can I do to prevent further fractures?

If you have ever had a broken wrist, spine or hip bone after a fall from standing and you are not on bone protective medication, your chance of breaking a bone next time you have an injury is high compared to the rest of the population. If you break a long bone such as your hip or multiple bones, your chance of returning home to your previous level of function can become much lower.

In order to increase your chances of staying well, **please book a routine appointment with your GP** for an assessment of your bone health. This might include blood tests to replace any deficiencies in minerals or vitamins, an assessment of your risk of falling and an assessment of your bone strength using the FRAX score or a DEXA scan. At the end you may be offered treatment if required in the form of medication, physiotherapy or home modifications as well as regular follow up to check on your progress.

How will my bone strength be assessed?

Your risk of having another fracture can be calculated using a FRAX tool. This looks at various risk factors, including the ones described above.

- If you have a **low score** you do not need further tests.
- If you have a **medium score**, you will be referred for a scan of your bones called a DEXA. This is a scan used to diagnose osteoporosis, and will determine whether to start bone protective medication.
- If you have a **high score**, you may be started on bone protection without a scan.

Is there anything else I can do to make my bones stronger?

Having a good diet with plenty of calcium and vitamin D will help strengthen your bones, as well as maintaining a healthy weight and exercising regularly, if possible. Cutting down on smoking and alcohol are advised; if you need any help with this contact your GP who will be able to signpost you to useful resources.