

Facts About Elder Abuse – Types of Abuse and the Signs

By Lindy Taylor, MD

Elder abuse is a general term used to describe certain types of harm to older adults and is defined as "a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person."

It often includes harm by people the older person knows or with whom they have a relationship.

An abuser can be a spouse, partner, relative, friend, neighbor or a paid worker. The majority of abusers are relatives, typically the spouse/partner or sons and daughters, although the type of abuse differs according to the relationship.

In some cases the older abuser becomes the older victim and the younger victim becomes the younger abuser. With sons and daughters it can be financial abuse, justified by a belief that it's nothing more than the "advance inheritance" of property or money.

Within paid care environments, abuse can be inflicted by a single individual upon an older person or as a consequence of lack of knowledge or training.

In the United States:

- 1 million to 2 million Americans age 65 or older have been injured,

exploited or otherwise mistreated by someone on whom they depended for care or protection.

- Frequency of elder abuse ranges from 2 percent to 10 percent.
- One in 14 incidents, excluding incidents of self-neglect, comes to the attention of authorities.
- It's estimated that for every one case of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation or self-neglect reported to authorities, about five more go unreported.

There are many types of abuse, including:

- Physical: Hitting, burning, pushing, kicking, restraining or giving too much medication or the wrong medication
- Psychological/Emotional: Shouting, swearing, frightening, ridiculing, ignoring or humiliating a person
- Financial: Illegal or unauthorized use of a person's property, money, pension book or other items
- Sexual: Forcing a person to take part in any sexual activity without his or her consent
- Neglect: Depriving a person of food, heat, clothing, comfort or essential medication

- Abandonment: Deserting an elderly, dependent person with the intent to abandon them or leave them unattended at a place for such a time period that is likely to endanger their health or welfare

Signs of Elder Abuse

An older person who is being abused:

- May seem depressed and withdrawn
- Refuses invitations to spend time away from their family or a caregiver
- Seems afraid to make their own decisions
- Seems to be hiding something about a caregiver
- Never seems to have any spending money
- May put off going to the doctor
- Seems to have too many household "accidents"

Elders can abuse/neglect themselves by not caring about their own personal health and well-being. Elder self-neglect can lead to illness, injury or even death. Common needs that seniors may deny themselves or ignore include:

- Sustenance (food or water)
- Cleanliness (bathing and personal hygiene)
- Adequate clothing for climate protection
- Proper shelter
- Adequate safety
- Clean and healthy surroundings
- Medical attention for serious illness
- Essential medications

Elders may choose to deny themselves some health or safety benefits, which may not be self-neglect. This may simply be their personal choice. Caregivers and other responsible individuals must honor these choices if the senior is sound of mind.

Elder abuse is a real and unfortunately common event that is not tolerable on a moral or legal basis. To report suspected elder abuse, neglect or exploitation occurring in the home or in long-term care facilities in Oregon – 800-232-3020

Additionally, the Siletz Community Health Clinic's health care team and Community Health Department have resources for you. Please call 541-444-1030 or 800-648-0449 if you need help.



Oct. 20 is World Osteoporosis Day: Know Your Risk

By Lindy Taylor, MD

Osteoporosis is known as thinning or weakening of the bones, a condition that makes a person more susceptible to broken bones.

Osteoporosis affects 1 out of 3 women and 1 out of 5 men age 50 and older.

In the United States today, 10 million people already have osteoporosis and 34 million more have low bone mass.

Osteoporosis is a silent and progressive disease, often diagnosed only after a person has broken a bone. This is especially true for men, who can easily be overlooked as being at risk for the disease.

The most common bones affected by osteoporosis are the spine, hips and wrists. Bones are made of living tissue that is constantly breaking itself down and rebuilding itself back up.

We reach our highest bone mass in our late 20s. From childhood through our 20s is the best time to ensure that our bones are strong and healthy with diet and plenty of physical activity.

Mom is right – 'Drink your milk, it is good for your bones.'

Milk contains calcium, the building block of our bones. We get vitamin D from the sun and some whole milk products. Other essential vitamins for bone growth, such as phosphorus, come from eating a balanced diet that includes fresh vegetables.

Dairy products are an excellent source of calcium; however, they also contain many calories, so it's important to pick the best way for you to provide your body with calcium, either through food, vitamin supplements or a combination of both.

Around age 40, the bone breakdown process becomes more intense, resulting in a slow decline in bone mass. When women reach menopause they stop producing estrogen, which increases bone loss even faster. The same is true for men as they age, without such an extreme drop off with the loss of hormones unless they suffer from low testosterone.

Risk factors for osteoporosis include a family history of osteoporosis, a history of broken bones, low physical activity, smoking, alcohol intake, long-term use of seizure medication or steroids, various nutritional disorders, menopause, being age 60 or older and men with hypogonadism.

Osteoporosis is a preventable and treatable disease.

Osteopenia and osteoporosis are detected by a dexascan, a special X-ray of the bones that compares your bone strength or density to others your age. With this measurement, you are given a score called a T-score that helps assess your risk of getting a fracture and helps guide medical intervention.

A hip fracture can have devastating consequences for individuals age 65 and older. Studies show:

- Up to 25 percent of elders suffering a hip fracture can die in the first year after the fracture.
- Up to 40 percent can lose their ability to walk independently.
- Up to 33 percent are totally dependent or in a nursing home in the year following a hip fracture.

Fall Prevention. Men and women with osteoporosis need to take care not to fall down. Some reasons people fall are poor vision, poor balance, diseases that affect your gait or the way you walk and medications such as sleeping pills. Tips to help prevent falls outdoors are:

- Use a cane or walker.
- Wear rubber-soled shoes so you don't slip.
- Walk on grass when sidewalks are slippery.
- In winter, put salt or kitty litter on icy sidewalks.

Some ways to help prevent falls indoors are:

- Keep rooms free of clutter, especially on floors.

- Use plastic or carpet runners on slippery floors.
- Wear low-heeled shoes and do not walk in socks, stockings or slippers.
- Be sure carpets and area rugs have skid-proof backs or are tacked to the floor.
- Be sure stairs are well-lit and have rails on both sides.
- Put grab bars on bathroom walls near tub, shower and toilet.
- Use a rubber bath mat in the shower or tub.
- Keep a flashlight next to your bed.
- Use a sturdy step-stool with a handrail and wide steps.
- Add more lights in rooms.
- Buy a cordless phone to keep with you so you don't have to rush to the phone.

Through the Elders Safety Program, we will come to your house to help you assess your rugs, toilet grab bars, shower and tub safety, etc.

For those at risk for osteoporosis, your provider may order special X-rays or labs. If you are interested in being screened, we will hold a screening in October.

Please call the Community Health Department with any questions at 541-444-9633 or 800-648-0449, ext. 1633.