

Options Available to Treat Spinal Fractures from Osteoporosis

By Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS, of *Spine & Scoliosis Specialists*



I frequently treat fractures due to osteoporosis using innovative technology. Below I answer common questions about compression fractures due to osteoporosis.

What is osteoporosis? Is it painful?

Osteoporosis is a condition in which bones become fragile and easily broken. Bone loss can begin as early as age 30. It can happen without symptoms. Talk to your doctor about your bone health and take a bone density test. A calcium-rich diet, weight-bearing exercise, and the avoidance of smoking and excessive alcohol intake can help prevent bone loss. However, osteoporosis remains a significant healthcare problem in the U.S, causing more than 700,000 spinal fractures annually.

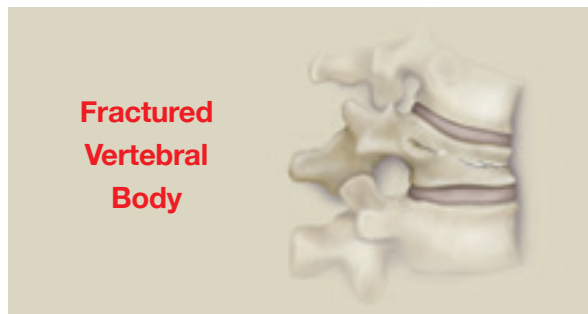
Osteoporosis is not painful, but it can lead to small fractures that cause compression of the vertebral body. In fact, approximately 50% of women and 25% of men older than 50 will experience an osteoporosis-related fracture in their lifetime. Some of these fractures go undiagnosed and untreated because patients do not experience any pain. Left untreated, however, these compression fractures can create a curvature of the spine, sometimes called a “dowager’s hump.” Over time, this curvature can become painful. In other people, a compression fracture may result from an acute injury, such as a fall which cause pain immediately.

What happens if you have a spinal fracture?

After experiencing one fracture, your risk of a second fracture is greatly increased. In addition, just one fracture affects how weight is distributed through the spine, thus placing higher than normal stress on the front of the spine. With additional fractures, it can become progressively difficult to walk, eat and sleep due to pain and unnatural spinal alignment. You should see a doctor to determine your condition and appropriate treatment.



Normal Vertebral Body



Fractured Vertebral Body



Balloon Kyphoplasty

What have been the traditional treatments for a spinal fracture?

Treatments for spinal fracture typically have included extended bed rest, pain medications, and back braces, all of which relieve pain but do not address the deformity caused by the fracture. Open surgery is an option, but it is more invasive than non-surgical management and is reserved for patients with neurological complications.

Is there a newer option for treatment of a spinal fracture?

Balloon kyphoplasty is a minimally invasive procedure that is designed to treat the fracture and restore the vertebra to the correct position.

Balloon kyphoplasty has been demonstrated to significantly reduce back pain, increase mobility, correct spinal deformity and improve quality of life. After the procedure, patients experience an increased ability to return to simple everyday activities, such as walking, reaching, bending and lifting.

How is balloon kyphoplasty performed?

Balloon kyphoplasty is performed by a spine specialist in less than 30 minutes. It is often performed in a hospital under general anesthesia. This may require an overnight stay in the hospital.

However, in some cases, the doctors at Spine & Scoliosis Specialists can perform balloon kyphoplasty in the office using local anesthesia, without the need for hospitalization.

Visit the Knowledge Center on the Spine & Scoliosis Specialists website at www.spineandscoliosisdocs.com or call us at 336-333-6306 to schedule a consultation. **WJ**

Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS, the founding physician of Spine & Scoliosis Specialists, is the only doctor in the Triad with double fellowship training in spine and scoliosis surgery. He has treated tens of thousands of patients and performed thousands of surgeries since he began practicing in 2002. He completed his training at Cornell University's prestigious Hospital for Special Surgery, the top-ranked orthopaedics hospital in the U.S.

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