



# Postmenopausal Osteoporosis Care: Shifting Paradigms and Emerging Therapies

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## KEYWORDS

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## ABSTRACT:

**Introduction:** Osteoporosis, a chronic condition predominantly affecting postmenopausal women, significantly impairs quality of life. While conventional treatments prevail, emerging alternative therapies offer promising solutions for enhanced bone health.

**Methodology:** This review synthesizes evidence from multiple databases, encompassing traditional therapies (bisphosphonates, calcium, and vitamin D supplementation) and innovative approaches (vibration therapy and bone-building devices like Osteoboost).

**Results:** Findings confirm the efficacy of traditional treatments in maintaining bone density and reducing fracture risk. Notably, novel therapies demonstrate potential for bone regeneration without medication.

**Conclusion:** Traditional therapies remain essential, while alternative approaches like vibration therapy offer innovative options for osteoporosis management. Further research is warranted to optimize these therapies and improve patient outcomes.

**Abbreviations:** BMD = bone mineral density, BPs = bisphosphonates, FDA = Food and Drug Administration, HRT = Hormone Replacement Therapy, PTH = parathyroid hormone, RANKL = receptor activator of nuclear factor- $\kappa$ B ligand, TNF- $\alpha$  = tumor necrosis factor-alpha, WHO = World Health Organization.

## 1. Introduction

Osteoporosis is a metabolic bone disease characterized by decreased bone mineral density and mass, leading to an increased risk of bone fractures in adults <sup>1,2</sup>. This condition is often referred to as a "silent disease" because bone loss occurs without noticeable symptoms until fractures occur, with osteoporosis being the underlying cause of up to two-thirds of vertebral fractures <sup>3</sup>.

Osteoporosis is a prevalent disease, affecting approximately one-third of women and one-fifth of men worldwide over the age of 50 <sup>4</sup>. According to a 2021 meta-analysis, the global prevalence of osteoporosis is 18.3% (95% CI: 16.2-20.7), with a significantly higher prevalence among women (23.1%, 95% CI: 19.8-26.9) compared to men (11.7%, 95% CI: 9.6-14.1) <sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, research has shown that women aged 50 and above are four times more likely to develop osteoporosis and twice as likely to experience osteopenia, with fractures occurring 5-10 years earlier than in men <sup>6</sup>.

The global prevalence of osteoporosis is alarmingly high, with disproportionately higher rates in Africa and Europe <sup>5</sup>. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 200 million women worldwide suffer from osteoporosis, with a staggering 30% of postmenopausal white Caucasian women in the USA affected <sup>4,7</sup>.

A study assessing the global burden of osteoporosis revealed that in 2019, five countries bore the highest burden of disability-adjusted life-years due to low bone mineral density-related fractures. These countries were India, China, the USA, Japan, and Germany, accounting for 25.59%, 18.75%, 8.35%, 3.29%, and 3.04% of the global burden, respectively <sup>8</sup>.

The diagnosis of osteoporosis and assessment of fracture risk rely on bone mineral density (BMD) as the standard measure. Dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) scans measure BMD and generate a T-score, which the World Health Organization (WHO) uses to define osteoporosis. According to WHO criteria:



- Normal bone density: T-score within 1 standard deviation (SD) of the young adult mean BMD (-1 to +1 SD)

- Low bone mass: T-score 1-2.5 SD below the young adult mean BMD (-1 to -2.5 SD)

- Osteoporosis: T-score 2.5 SD or more below the young adult mean BMD (more than -2.5 SD) <sup>9</sup>

Osteoporosis significantly impairs quality of life, substantially increasing the risk of fractures. Studies have shown that patients with osteoporotic fractures experience lower health-related quality of life and overall health status <sup>10</sup>. Fractures are associated with increased premature mortality, disability, and financial burden <sup>11,12</sup>. Various environmental factors influence the risk of osteoporotic fractures, such as smoking, which is an independent risk factor in postmenopausal women, whereas physical activity promotes bone mass retention <sup>13</sup>.

Osteoporosis has far-reaching consequences on both health and economics, primarily due to fragility fractures affecting the hip, spine, and wrist. These fractures lead to substantial morbidity, including chronic pain, reduced mobility, and psychological effects like depression and social isolation. The economic burden is equally severe, with estimated global direct and indirect costs of hip fractures projected to rise from \$34.8 billion in 1990 to \$131.5 billion by 2050 <sup>14</sup>.

Additional risk factors for osteoporosis in postmenopausal white or Caucasian women include low calcium intake, heavy alcohol consumption, and use of long half-life psychotropic drugs. Protective factors include vitamin D intake, fluoride in drinking water, breastfeeding, and use of thiazide diuretics or progesterone <sup>15</sup>.

Bone strength depends on various factors, including bone structure, cortical bone thickness, and inherent bone tissue qualities. Dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) measures bone mineral density (BMD) to indirectly assess bone strength <sup>16</sup>. The Fracture Risk Assessment Tool combines clinical risk factors with BMD T-scores to evaluate the likelihood of future fractures <sup>17</sup>. Clinical risk factors include demographic details, medical history, and lifestyle elements such as smoking and alcohol consumption <sup>17</sup>.

In 1999, the Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation published the Clinician's Guide, a comprehensive resource for osteoporosis prevention and treatment. The guide provides concise guidelines on prevention, risk assessment, diagnosis, and management, including fracture risk thresholds for pharmaceutical intervention <sup>18</sup>. Despite advancements in diagnostics and treatments, postmenopausal women with osteoporosis continue to experience a diminished quality of life, emphasizing the need for effective preventive strategies.

Current treatment options encompass both pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches to prevent fractures. However, these treatments are not universally suitable. Calcium and vitamin D supplementation can enhance bone density, but may be less effective in patients taking levothyroxine for thyroid disease due to decreased absorption <sup>19</sup>. Hormone replacement therapy for postmenopausal women remains controversial due to its numerous side effects <sup>20</sup>. Bisphosphonates, widely prescribed for postmenopausal osteoporosis, can improve bone mineral density but are also associated with various side effects, including infusion reactions, hypocalcemia, and gastrointestinal adverse effects.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has made two significant announcements regarding the management of osteoporosis, signaling a shift in treatment strategies. Firstly, the FDA has introduced a "Boxed Warning" for Prolia (denosumab), highlighting the increased risk of severe hypocalcemia in patients with advanced chronic kidney disease <sup>22</sup>. Secondly, the FDA has approved "Osteoboost," a wearable belt designed to deliver calibrated vibration to the hips and lumbar spine, which is expected to prevent decreases in bone density in postmenopausal women <sup>23</sup>.

This review aims to critically evaluate the current treatment options available for osteoporosis, comparing traditional treatment approaches prior to 2019 with recent advancements from 2019 onwards.

## 2. Methods

A thorough literature search was conducted using PubMed and Google Scholar to investigate emerging strategies for managing osteoporosis in postmenopausal women. The search employed specific terms, including "osteoporosis," "postmenopausal women," "bone



density," and "fracture prevention," along with MeSH terms and Boolean operators. The search encompassed *in vitro*, *in vivo*, and human studies, without temporal restrictions.

Studies were screened based on predefined inclusion criteria, which comprised research focusing on osteoporosis management in postmenopausal women, encompassing both traditional and innovative approaches, and published in English. Exclusion criteria consisted of irrelevant topics, editorials, and commentaries. Selected articles underwent in-depth review, and additional pertinent studies were identified through reference lists. Relevant data were extracted and synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of traditional and innovative management strategies, including the integration of advanced technologies in osteoporosis care.

### 3. Pathophysiology

At the cellular level, the decline in sex steroids and aging lead to an imbalance in bone remodeling, characterized by increased bone resorption and decreased bone formation by osteoclasts and osteoblasts, respectively<sup>24,25</sup>. Pro-inflammatory cytokines, such as TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1, IL-6, and the RANKL/RANK/Osteoprotegerin system, play a crucial role in osteoclast differentiation and are linked to estrogen deficiency in the bone microenvironment<sup>26</sup>.

The RANKL peptide, expressed by osteocytes, interacts with the RANK receptor on osteoclast precursors, promoting their differentiation into mature osteoclasts. Macrophage colony-stimulating factor, produced by osteoblasts, also contributes to osteoclast precursor differentiation<sup>27,28</sup>. Additionally, osteoblast-derived chemokines facilitate osteoclast precursor recruitment and degradation of unmineralized osteoid by matrix metalloproteinases<sup>28</sup>. Osteoclast-secreted hydrogen ions and lysosomal enzymes drive acidification and proteolysis, leading to bone resorption<sup>29</sup>.

However, Osteoprotegerin can inhibit RANK-RANKL interactions, reducing bone resorption by preventing osteoclast differentiation and promoting apoptosis. In age-related osteoporosis, altered Bone Marrow Stromal Cell (BMSC) lineage distribution leads to increased adipocyte differentiation, resulting in an accumulation of

Bone Marrow Adipose Tissue. This impairs osteoblast differentiation and bone formation<sup>30</sup>.

### 4. Traditional treatment

#### 4.1 Vitamins

Maintaining optimal bone health relies heavily on adequate calcium and vitamin D intake<sup>31</sup>. High-calcium foods, supplements, and sunlight exposure are recommended, particularly for high-risk groups such as older individuals and those on glucocorticoid therapy. While daily supplementation with 800 IU of vitamin D and 1000-1200mg of calcium is generally recommended for postmenopausal women, individualized dosages may be necessary<sup>32</sup>. Research has shown that calcium and vitamin D supplementation can moderately reduce bone loss in women aged 65 and older<sup>33</sup>. However, caution is advised when using calcium supplements in postmenopausal women with dyslipidemia, as they may increase serum total cholesterol concentration and carotid intima thickness<sup>34</sup>.

Studies have revealed a positive correlation between water-soluble vitamins and bone mineral density (BMD), while fat-soluble vitamins were negatively associated with BMD<sup>35</sup>. Other essential nutrients, including magnesium, potassium, and polyunsaturated fatty acids, also contribute to bone health, emphasizing the importance of a balanced diet<sup>36</sup>. Emerging research suggests that supplementation with B vitamins, omega-3 fatty acids, soy isoflavones, and dehydroepiandrosterone may offer additional benefits for bone health improvement and osteoporosis risk reduction when consumed as part of a well-rounded diet<sup>37,38</sup>. Regular follow-up and personalized dietary plans are crucial for comprehensive bone health management.

#### 4.2 Lifestyle modification

Lifestyle modifications play a crucial role in maintaining bone health and preventing osteoporosis. High-intensity resistance training has been shown to significantly improve bone mineral density (BMD) at the lumbar spine and femoral neck, while regular walking benefits femoral neck BMD<sup>39</sup>. Interestingly, low to moderate-intensity physical activity is considered more effective than high-intensity exercises for optimizing BMD.

Regular exercise has been proven to decrease the risk of osteoporosis in postmenopausal women<sup>40</sup>. Moreover,



fall prevention measures are essential in reducing fracture risks associated with osteoporosis. These measures include exercises to improve balance and strength, home modifications, and the use of aids like grab bars. Healthcare providers should encourage these lifestyle changes to support bone health and prevent complications<sup>41-44</sup>.

### 4.3 Medications

Various medications are available for the management of osteoporosis, each with distinct mechanisms of action. Bisphosphonates (BPs) inhibit bone resorption, while Denosumab neutralizes RANKL, a protein involved in bone breakdown. Teriparatide, on the other hand, stimulates bone remodeling, promoting new bone growth.

Other treatment options include estrogen agonists, calcitonin, and hormone therapy, which may also be effective in managing osteoporosis. A thorough understanding of the mechanisms and efficacy of these medications enables healthcare providers to develop personalized treatment approaches tailored to individual patient needs.

#### 4.3.1 Bisphosphonates

For postmenopausal women at high risk of fractures, initial treatment with bisphosphonates (BPs) or denosumab is recommended<sup>45</sup>. BPs, including alendronate, risedronate, zoledronic acid, and ibandronate, bind to bone minerals and are internalized by mature osteoclasts at bone resorption sites<sup>46</sup>. Aminobisphosphonates, which contain nitrogen, impair osteoclast function by inhibiting farnesyl pyrophosphate synthase (FPPS), disrupting GTPase activity, and ultimately accelerating osteoclast apoptosis and preventing bone resorption<sup>47-50</sup>.

The binding affinity of BPs to bone minerals varies, with zoledronic acid having the highest affinity, followed by alendronate, ibandronate, and risedronate<sup>51</sup>. As a result, BPs can remain bound to bone minerals for many years, exerting residual pharmacological effects even after discontinuation<sup>51-55</sup>. In contrast, other anti-resorptive therapies, such as denosumab, estrogen, raloxifene, and calcitonin, quickly lose activity after discontinuation.

Common adverse effects associated with BPs include renal toxicity, acute-phase reactions, gastrointestinal issues, and osteonecrosis of the jaw<sup>56</sup>.

#### 4.3.2 Denosumab

Denosumab is a fully human monoclonal antibody that potently inhibits bone resorption by targeting RANKL. Its high affinity and specificity for RANKL enable denosumab to impede osteoclast differentiation, function, and survival<sup>57,58</sup>. Unlike bisphosphonates (BPs), denosumab effectively suppresses osteoclast activity across all developmental stages, resulting in improved accessibility to bone remodeling compartments in cortical bone<sup>46,59</sup>.

Common side effects of denosumab include rash, pruritis, and urticaria<sup>60</sup>. Recently, the FDA issued a warning regarding denosumab's potential to cause severe hypocalcemia in patients with advanced chronic kidney disease<sup>22</sup>. This condition typically develops 2-10 weeks after denosumab injection, with the highest risk occurring between weeks 2-5. Severe hypocalcemia can lead to complications such as arrhythmias, particularly in patients on dialysis, who may exhibit symptoms including confusion, seizures, facial twitching, and muscle weakness.

#### 4.3.3 Parathyroid Hormone (PTH) Analogues

PTH analogues, such as Teriparatide (Forteo), are recommended for treating glucocorticoid-induced osteoporosis and severe osteoporosis in postmenopausal women and men<sup>61</sup>. Randomized controlled trials have consistently shown that Teriparatide reduces the risk of vertebral and nonvertebral fractures more effectively and rapidly than antiresorptive treatments, which decrease both bone formation and resorption<sup>62,63</sup>. Additionally, Teriparatide increases bone mineral density (BMD) at the spine and hip, improves bone quality and architecture, and enhances trabecular and cortical bone volume and thickness<sup>64,65</sup>.

However, due to the potential risk of osteosarcoma, a rare bone cancer, the use of Teriparatide is limited to a specific duration. Furthermore, this medication is contraindicated in patients with certain medical conditions, including hyperparathyroidism, kidney stones, or Paget's disease<sup>66</sup>.



#### 4.3.4 Estrogen Agonist

The decline in estrogen levels following menopause accelerates bone loss and increases the likelihood of fractures. Research has demonstrated a dose-dependent effect of estrogen on bone turnover and bone mineral density (BMD) changes. Menopausal hormone therapy (MHT) effectively prevents bone loss and deterioration of bone structure in postmenopausal women, reducing fracture risk by 20-40% across all bone sites<sup>67,68</sup>. Notably, MHT is the only treatment that has shown efficacy in preventing osteoporosis, even in low-risk postmenopausal women<sup>69</sup>.

Continuous use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is necessary for effective fracture prevention. However, long-term use of combined HRT is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer diagnosis<sup>19</sup>. Estrogen therapy, regardless of administration method, has a positive impact on bone health. Nevertheless, research suggests that postmenopausal women may require more than 7 years of estrogen replacement therapy to maintain bone mineral density in the long term<sup>70</sup>. Long-term estrogen replacement therapy also increases the risk of breast cancer.

Raloxifene, a selective estrogen receptor modulator, has been shown to be effective in preventing and treating postmenopausal osteoporosis, although less effective than estrogen<sup>71</sup>. However, caution is advised when using raloxifene due to its association with an increased risk of thromboembolism<sup>72</sup>.

#### 4.3.5 Calcitonin

Calcitonin is a 32-amino acid peptide that binds to osteoclasts, inhibiting bone resorption<sup>73</sup>. This hormone serves three primary functions: promoting calcium absorption into bones, inhibiting calcium reabsorption in the kidneys, and reducing calcium reabsorption in the small intestine. As a result, calcitonin facilitates calcium storage within bones, making it a potential treatment for osteoporosis<sup>74</sup>. However, its use is limited by the availability of more effective treatments, such as bisphosphonates (BPs), which are more effective in preventing bone loss and reducing fracture risk<sup>32</sup>.

## 5. Recent advancements in treating osteoporosis

### 5.1 Romosozumab

Romosozumab, a humanized monoclonal antibody, is a sclerostin inhibitor used to treat osteoporosis in postmenopausal women at high risk of fractures. By facilitating the Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin pathway, romosozumab promotes osteogenesis and partially inhibits bone resorption<sup>75-77</sup>. Its mechanism involves blocking sclerostin, enabling Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin signaling to stimulate osteoblast development and bone growth<sup>78,79</sup>.

Clinical trials have demonstrated romosozumab's efficacy in reducing the risk of vertebral, nonvertebral, and clinical fractures in postmenopausal women with osteoporosis. Specifically, romosozumab reduced the risk of vertebral fractures by 73% compared to placebo and by 48% compared to alendronate<sup>80</sup>. Additionally, phase II research showed a significant increase in lumbar spine bone mineral density (11.3%) with a monthly 210mg dose<sup>21</sup>. The FRAME trial confirmed romosozumab's ability to protect postmenopausal women from vertebral fractures<sup>75</sup>.

Common side effects of romosozumab include headaches, muscular spasms, arthralgia, and injection-site reactions<sup>28</sup>. However, a notable consideration is romosozumab's cardiovascular risk profile. The ARCH trial revealed a 30% increased risk of serious cardiovascular adverse events, primarily driven by a higher rate of myocardial infarction, compared to alendronate<sup>81</sup>.

### 5.2 Vibration Therapy

Vibration therapy utilizes high-frequency, low-magnitude vibrations to stimulate muscles and bones, promoting bone strength and density. There are two primary types of vibrating devices: whole-body vibration devices and single-muscle vibration devices. Space agencies have employed whole-body vibration therapy to improve bone mineral density (BMD) in astronauts returning from space missions<sup>82</sup>. Research has consistently shown that high-frequency, low-magnitude vibration therapy enhances bone strength by promoting bone formation and reducing bone resorption<sup>83</sup>.

The mechanism of action involves sending anabolic signals to bone, muscles, and tendons, improving blood circulation, and differentiating stem cells into



osteoblasts. Additionally, vibration therapy reduces the formation of excessive osteoclasts by facilitating gap junction communication in osteocytes<sup>82</sup>. This therapy has been shown to reduce pain and fatigue, enhance muscle strength and flexibility, aid in rehabilitation, and boost bone density. However, a standardized protocol for vibration therapy is lacking<sup>84</sup>.

A novel wearable device, Osteoboost, has been designed to enhance bone strength and density by delivering focused vibrations to the lumbar spine and hips. This device incorporates a motor that transmits low-amplitude, high-frequency (20-40 Hz) vibrations to the spine and hips, mimicking the effects of physical activity. Osteoboost has been shown to improve bone density and strength, particularly in individuals with osteoporosis, reducing the risk of fractures<sup>85</sup>.

A clinical trial investigating the effect of Osteoboost in 126 postmenopausal women with low bone mass demonstrated a significant difference in loss of vertebral bone strength. The study found that Osteoboost treatment had positive effects in preserving volumetric bone density and vertebral bone strength in postmenopausal women with low bone mass<sup>85</sup>. The Osteoboost Belt has undergone review by the FDA and has been classified as a prescription device, indicated for postmenopausal women with osteopenia to reduce volumetric bone density decline and bone strength decline<sup>86</sup>.

Osteoboost presents a novel approach to treating low bone density in postmenopausal women, utilizing vibration to stimulate bone formation and prevent fractures. This technology has demonstrated clinical efficacy and safety in pivotal trials. While Osteoboost offers promise, its availability is currently limited, and individual responses may vary. Further research is necessary to determine the cost-effectiveness and optimal usage duration required to maintain the benefits of this therapy. Patients interested in Osteoboost should discuss its potential benefits and risks with their healthcare providers, and adopt a healthy lifestyle, ensuring adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D to complement this treatment approach<sup>87</sup>.

## 6. Traditional vs Recent Treatment Options

Table 1 compares the effectiveness and adverse effects of traditional treatment approaches (pre-2019) with recent treatment options (2019 onwards) for osteoporosis in postmenopausal women<sup>88-95</sup>.

Although various treatment options are available, most carry FDA box warnings for serious consequences (Table 1)<sup>96-98</sup>. Given this, the newer vibration device, Osteoboost, may offer a safer alternative for managing osteoporosis.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, conventional osteoporosis treatments, including PTH analogs, hormone therapy, and denosumab, have shown promising results. However, each option has distinct side effects, and FDA warnings, such as the recent alert regarding denosumab-induced hypocalcemia, highlight the need for alternative approaches. Osteoboost, a non-pharmacological vibration therapy, emerges as a promising alternative with potentially fewer side effects. Further long-term studies are essential to compare Osteoboost's efficacy and cost-effectiveness with existing monoclonal antibodies and medications for osteoporosis.

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