

Part Two
Common problems in people aging with HIV

Chapter 7
Weak bones

Section I. Weak bones and its importance

7-1. What causes weak bones?

Bone is a living organ. Throughout your life, the body tries to take away old bones and put in new ones. As you get older, the body gets worse at making new bones. This makes bones thin and weak. Also, other things can make your bones weak. Some you can control, like smoking or low vitamin D. Others you cannot control, like pill side effects or having HIV.

7-2. How does HIV make your bones weak?

- a. *HIV messes up bone function:* HIV makes the body take away bones faster than it should. It also slows down the building of new bones.
- b. *HIV pills:* Some HIV pills have a side effect of weakening bones. Since you need HIV pills, you can strengthen bones in other ways (paragraph 7-4 to 7-9).

7-3. What happens when bones are weak?

When bones are weak, even a light fall can break a bone. Broken bones cause pain and loss of function. For example, people with broken hips have hip pain and cannot walk until they get surgery. Even after surgery, some people cannot walk as well as they used to. Broken bones can also lead to other health problems and death.

Section II. Weak bones: what to do with your doctor

7-4. Ask if you should get checked for weak bones

People with HIV over 50 years old should get checked for weak bones. This is because weak bones do not change how you feel on a daily basis. You may not know you have weak bones until you break one and it is too late.

7-5. Ask if you need to take pills for weak bones

Many pills can help the body build bones faster. It also slows down bone loss. Sometimes, your doctor will give you calcium and vitamin D, so the body can use them to build new bones.

Section III. Weak bones: what to do on your own

7-6. Take pills correctly

Take the right amount of pills at the right time of day. If this is difficult, use a pillbox or ask someone to remind you. This is really important for your bones. Pills for weak bones will not work if not taken correctly. Also, the lower your HIV, the stronger your bones will be.

7-7. Eat a healthy diet

Our body uses calcium and vitamin D from food to build bones. A good diet will give you what your bones need and keep you on a healthy weight. If you are not sure that your diet has enough calcium and vitamin D, ask to see a nutritionist.

7-8. Exercise

Exercise can help bones and muscles get stronger. It also stops accidents and falls. Even a bit of exercise helps. Any type of exercise is better than none. If you are not sure where to start, ask to see a physical therapist.

7-9. Do not smoke cigarettes or drink too much alcohol

Smoking and too much alcohol make bones weak and cause many health problems. Too much alcohol can be bad, but a bit of alcohol can be good for some people. For example, one drink of alcohol per day can lower the risk for heart disease. One drink is a bottle or can of beer, a glass of wine, or a shot of spirits (like gin or vodka). Let your doctor know how much you are drinking. Ask if this amount is right for you. Also, make sure to drink safely, not while driving or using machines.