# Coping With Osteoporosis, Anxiety and Depression

by ERIC PATTERSON

## Coping With Anxiety and Depression While Managing Osteoporosis

Believe it or not, some stress is a good thing.  In some situations, stress can boost performance, concentration and energy levels.  Stress can motivate the college student to study hard and efficiently.  It can push an employee to completing work faster than his boss thought possible.  It can compel the athlete to knock the ball out of the park or to sink the winning putt.

So, why does stress get such a bad name?  The problem begins when stress becomes chronic.  With enough time, stress begins to wear out your healthy coping skills and protective strategies.  Once your skills are down to zero, stress takes hold and promotes a negative presence in your life.

The best solution is to avoid stress whenever possible, but if you have osteoporosis, you know that stress avoidance is impossible.  You may fear the next big fall or have intense concern that a sneeze or cough could lead to a break.  Osteoporosis is constant stress.  You need to know how to deal with it.

### Anxiety and Osteoporosis

One of the most common mental health issues for people with osteoporosis is anxiety.  Gaining awareness into the symptoms of anxiety gives you the ability to look in on yourself to track the changes.  Oftentimes, it is helpful to ask others in your life if they have noticed changes in you as your self-monitoring may be flawed or inaccurate.  Symptoms of anxiety include:

- Increased worry about aspects of your life. The worry might be related to a specific activity, item or situation or it could be widespread to all aspects of your life.
- Problems paying attention to conversations or work. Feeling that your mind is blank.
- Problems falling asleep because your mind is spinning or trouble staying asleep
- Feeling more angry, irritable and having a shorter temper
- Feeling physically tense and restless
- Being fatigued, tired and having less energy

Self-talk does a lot to influence your anxiety.  Your self-talk is the internal dialogue that you have with yourself throughout the day.  Everyone has a steady stream of communication in their mind and what you say to yourself can trigger anxiety.  A cornerstone of anxious self-talk is the question “What if.”  When anxiety begins, you may ask yourself “What if my osteoporosis gets worse?” or “What if I fall and can’t get help?”  These questions are natural but anxiety begins to speed them up and repeat them endlessly.  Then, the questions mutate to become less rational and more fear-based.  Your body becomes tense, and you become more irritable.

Many people with osteoporosis become so overwhelmed with anxiety that they begin to withdrawal and isolate.  They become panicky and rarely leave the house.  Anxiety has convinced these people that the risks of walking out of the front door are too great.

## Depression and Osteoporosis

Some people with osteoporosis are likely to experience increased anxiety. Others are more likely to experience symptoms of depression. As with anxiety, knowing the symptoms of depression gives you the ability to recognize these issues in yourself before they grow out of control. Symptoms of depression include:

- Increased feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness with poor self-esteem
- Increased difficulty focusing, concentrating and maintain attention
- Changes in weight marked by significant weight gain or loss
- Changes in sleep including sleeping too much or too little
- Less interest in doing things and having less energy to do things you enjoy
- Thoughts of suicide or thinking the world would be better off without you

With osteoporosis, like other chronic medical conditions, depression moves in as grief and loss. People experience feelings of loss for a number of reasons that extend beyond death. Loss of functioning and a massive shift in self-perceptions trigger a loss reaction. Feelings like confusion, shock, denial, anger and depression begin to present during the process of resolving the loss. Since osteoporosis is such a devastating blow, many people become stuck on the feelings of depression.

Like with anxiety, your self-talk plays a huge part in your depression beyond grief. Imagine someone that you love and care about systematically telling you that you are worthless, unlovable and a burden. Maybe you could rebound after hearing this once or twice but not if it was all day every day. If you say to yourself that osteoporosis is the worst thing that could ever happen to you, you will never be able to deal with it, your life is going to be terrible now and other similarly negative things, depression builds and becomes more pervasive as it wears down your defenses. Negative self-talk over an extended period of time will create depression where none existed before.

*Next page: reduce stress and limit anxiety and depression.*

## Beat Back the Stress

The stress of osteoporosis is likely to stay for a while. Because of this, having a plan to reduce stress and improve overall well-being will help your ability to limit the influence of anxiety and depression on your life. Here's how:

- **Target self-talk.** You have seen the powerful effects of self-talk on your life. Anxiety and depression need a steady supply of negative self-talk to maintain their corruption. Begin changing the process by taking note of your self-talk. Ignoring the problem does not change it. Make mental notes, or even better, write down your thoughts during the day. Pay attention to the messages your give yourself and track the feelings that accompany the thoughts. Negative thoughts lead to negative feelings. The good news is that the opposite is also true. Do not take a backseat to your self-talk.

- **Aim for success.** Stress makes it harder to take care of yourself and poor self-care increases stress. Make yourself the priority by focusing on the trio of diet, sleep and exercise. Making appropriate diet choices, allowing enough time to get eight hours of sleep each night and exercising more often will improve your physical health and boost your energy throughout the day. The three are related to fewer osteoporosis symptoms which will result in less stress. More importantly, the influence on your mental health is incredible. Your moods will be less depressed while your concentration and problem-solving skills improve. The routine you build will fight against anxiety and isolation
- **Shrink the negatives.** Take an inventory of your stressors beyond your osteoporosis and rank their impact. Work to eliminate or modify these to reduce stress. Be cautious, though. Spending too much effort trying to change something that is unchangeable only leads to increased stress. Choose to battle some of the smaller negatives initially. Doing so will give you useful information about productive methods for fighting stress. Once you build momentum, you can target bigger stressors.

- **Magnify the positives.** You can never eliminate all negatives.  Adding positives helps add balance to tip the scales in your favor.  If your positives can outweigh the negatives, you will feel more empowered and optimistic about the future.  List positives and be sure to differentiate them from the neutral life experiences.  Rather than being glued to the couch, go for a walk outside or meet a friend for dinner.  Scheduling your positives will make them easier to complete.  The sense of accomplishment you receive will minimize your stress.

- **Strive for relaxation.** One of the best positives you can add is relaxation.  Too many people take relaxation for granted, but it can actually be confusing and challenging at first.  Explore your options.  Relaxation techniques begin with deep breathing and end at complex meditations.  Refuse to give up on relaxation before you find success.  Repetition and experimentation throughout the day is a must to achieve the desired result.  You should be no different.
- **Seek the professionals.** Putting too much pressure on yourself to improve your thoughts, feelings and behaviors can lead to more stress while feeling that you have to combat osteoporosis alone builds frustration and hopelessness.  Therapists, counselors, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists are available to help you.  They have the experience and the training to accomplish your goals of decreased anxiety and depression.  Moving to a point of acceptance with osteoporosis means that you have a full awareness of your situation.  Stress cannot live in an accepting environment.

**Conclusion**

Combat depression and anxiety at the root: stress.  Stress is a simple concept that carries huge weight in the world of physical and mental health.  Understand the role that stress plays in building anxiety and depression and then crush it.  Beat back the stress to show it you’re the boss.