

## MY STORY

# Breaking Point

A BOOMER REFLECTS ON LIFE WITH OSTEOPOROSIS

**By Edie Tolchin**  
WebMD.com community member

I was 52 when my gynecologist said, “Let’s send you for a bone-density test. It’s a good time. You’re post-menopausal.” I had the test done, and the results showed that I had osteopenia, which indicates bone loss. But even though my bone density was lower than normal, it was not low enough for a full osteoporosis diagnosis.

Fast-forward about a year. I was having a horrible pain on the right side of my chest, under the breast. I went to the doctor and found I had a fractured rib. That’s when I was diagnosed with osteoporosis.

Sometimes when you have osteoporosis, you can have fractures—from things like coughing, or bending the wrong way, which is probably how my first fracture occurred.

I was put on bone-strengthening medication for five years but had to come off of that for two years due to complications. In the meantime, I’d moved and needed to find a new doctor. My new gynecologist also ordered a bone-density test, and it showed my osteoporosis had gotten worse.

Since then, I’ve had more rib fractures. I’ve coughed



and cracked a rib. Two years ago, I was in Italy on vacation with my two grown children. We were on a guided tour, walking on a dimly lit cobblestone street. I had my eyes on the group I was following, missed a step, landed on my side, and fractured several ribs. I was in terrible pain for the rest of that trip.

Now I’m much more careful where and how I walk. In the evening, I always walk where it’s well lit. I never walk on

cobblestones or gravel or uneven surfaces. In our house, too, we take precautions. We have good carpeting and flooring—no loose throw rugs to trip on. And our rooms have proper lighting.

My night vision isn’t good. I do have my vision checked every year to make sure it’s not getting worse. I don’t want to take the chance I could fall.

I exercise as much as I can. I lift small weights. I walk on a treadmill and ride a recumbent bicycle, using them interchangeably for about 30 minutes at least three times a week. The recumbent bicycle is easier on my back, since the osteoporosis has affected my spine and posture.

I’ve lost about an inch in height and, when I have back pain, I walk a bit hunched over. I’m in physical therapy, which has helped tremendously with my back pain. I do worry about breaking a hip or another bone but try to live my life as normally as possible.

I’m just more careful now, and so far I’ve not broken any more bones. I’m 61, and I think I’m doing the best I can to cope with this disease, which is common among boomer-age women.

## EDIE’S ADVICE

“Be informed about osteoporosis. Go online, but make sure you go to reputable sites.”

“Don’t be afraid to ask your doctor questions. Even after your visit, call if you have more questions.”

“Get a second or even third opinion if you’re unsure about your doctor. My gynecologist works with my endocrinologist, and both communicate to help me.”