

Your bones...your health.  
by Mike DeCinti

You have to be cautious sometimes when you see celebrities getting involved in “causes.” For the most part I’d like to think that they are sincere when they go out and preach things they’ve currently taken an interest in. But unfortunately more often than not, they are just using it to get publicity. Like Paris Hilton wearing a “VOTE” t-shirt during the 2006 election but not voting herself, or Sheryl Crow recently stating that we should only use one sheet of toilet paper to ward of “global warming” while she flies around in a private plane. Celebrities often jump on the bandwagon of current events without a genuine reason to be involved.

So recently when I saw actress Sally Field pushing the osteoporosis drug Boniva, I just assumed she was yet another “paid celebrity endorsement.” But after reading a story online I found out that she does in fact suffer from osteoporosis, commonly known as the “silent disease.”

May is National Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention Month, and besides Sally Field, 10 million Americans have this disease that is much more serious than most of us realize.

Osteoporosis, or porous bone, is a disease characterized by low bone mass and structural deterioration of bone tissue, leading to bone fragility and an increased susceptibility to fractures, especially of the hip, spine and wrist. It can progress for years without symptoms and is a threat for an estimated 44 million Americans, or 55 percent of the people 50 years of age or older. However it can strike an individual of any age.

The majority of those suffering from osteoporosis are non-Hispanic white and Asian women over the age of 50. But it does affect both men and women and people of all ethnic backgrounds are at risk. And since this disease occurs without symptoms people may not know they have it until their bones become so weak that a sudden strain, bump or fall can result in serious fractures.

Osteoporosis can become a very serious medical problem. In 2002 the estimated national costs for osteoporosis fractures was \$18 billion dollars a year, but there are steps you can take to prevent this from affecting you and your loved ones. Of course there are some risk factors you will not be able to control (being female, advanced age, having a small frame) but there are many that you can control. Below is some information on both detection and prevention. However, I encourage you to research this subject more by visiting websites like the National Osteoporosis Foundation ([www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)) to find out more.

The most important test that can be done is called a bone mineral density (BMD) test, which measures your bone density in various sites of the body. A BMD test can:

- Detect osteoporosis before a fracture occurs
- Predict chances of fracturing in the future
- Determine rate of bone loss and monitor treatment (if test is conducted annually)

A BMD test is performed with a piece of equipment called a dual energy X-ray absorptiometry or DEXA which only exposes the patient to 1/30<sup>th</sup> of the radiation used in a standard X-ray. You can get a BMD test at Lumberton Radiological Associates, just ask your healthcare provider.

Preventative measures should start early in life, but many of these can be adopted at any point. The best defense against developing osteoporosis is building strong bones during childhood and adolescence, but if you are past that stage, try some of these simple but helpful tips:

- A balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D
- Weight-bearing and/or resistance-training exercises
- Avoid smoking and excess alcohol intake
- Talk to your healthcare provider more about bone health and possible medications
- Consider getting a BMD test

And if you're still not convinced that this is a serious issue, here's some information that I found to be shocking. One of the most typical areas for a fracture to take place is the hip. One in five of those who suffer hip fractures require long-term care, often in a nursing home; after six months only 15% can walk across the room; and an average of 24% of those over the age of 50 die in the year following their fracture.