

Personal stories: Living with poor bone health.

Introducing Elaine who is a mum, grandmother and GP practice manager, based in Melbourne. Elaine is living with severe osteoporosis.

Wife, mother-to-three, and grandmother-to-twin girls, Elaine, 57, lives in Melbourne and relishes the precious time she spends with her gorgeous grandchildren. However, her life-altering diagnosis of osteoporosis two years ago has rendered her feeling old, fragile and with limited mobility.

At 52 years of age, Elaine was overwhelmed by sudden and severe lower back pain after making a slight twisting movement while cooking in her kitchen.

The pain persisted for the ensuing three years, during which Elaine sought professional help from various specialists (including a rheumatologist, a neurosurgeon and four pain physicians). During this period, she was misdiagnosed and treated for spinal arthritis. Elaine was however, unable to fathom how this form of arthritis was causing her such excruciating pain.

After noticing a slight curvature in her upper back in 2019, Elaine, then aged 55, requested a bone mineral density (BMD) scan from her GP. When the scan revealed she was living with severe osteoporosis, Elaine was immediately referred to an endocrinologist. Further tests identified vertebral fractures, and revealed she was also living with hyperparathyroidism (overactive parathyroid glands in the neck that cause various health problems, and can be a risk factor for osteoporosis), and vitamin D deficiency.

Today, Elaine is passionate about sharing her story to encourage others to be proactive about their bone health, and to seek an accurate medical diagnosis. She believes Australians aged 50 and over with risk factors need to be routinely investigated, similar to the routine checks available to those living with other chronic diseases.

This is Elaine's story.

After developing severe lower back pain at 52 years of age, Elaine proactively sought professional advice from various medical specialists. Over a three-year-long period, she endured ongoing and unexplained lower back pain, for which she was prescribed various medications for chronic pain, anti-depressants, and even sleeping pills to help manage her pain. This included spinal injections for her misdiagnosed osteoarthritis, and 10 months of physiotherapy.

"I had medications and physiotherapy for other conditions they thought were causing my pain. I responded poorly to my weekly physiotherapy sessions, and often felt more pain and stiffness at the end of each session," said Elaine.

Elaine relentlessly sought other professional opinions due to her ongoing pain.



In 2019, after noticing a slight hump in her upper back, Elaine requested a referral for a BMD scan. The results revealed she had severe osteoporosis, which led to her immediate referral to an endocrinologist for further examination, and to commence treatment.

Although relieved to finally have a correct diagnosis of osteoporosis, her disease has proven life-altering, given her spinal fractures severely limit her normal life. She now has restricted sitting, standing and walking endurance.

"I can no longer perform any gardening or household jobs that involve bending or lifting. So, I rely on my husband and daughter to do all of our housework and laundry."

"Not being able to lift my grandchildren has been devastating. I had always dreamed of being able to play with them and babysit when needed, but now someone else has to pick them up and put them on my lap," Elaine said.



Elaine has an extensive family history of bone disease. Her mum was diagnosed with osteoporosis at 70 years of age, and her sister fractured both humerus bones at 52 years of age, following a fall.

"Despite my family history of bone disease, it never crossed my mind, nor was it even suggested to me, that I may be at risk for developing osteoporosis, even after going through menopause.

"I exercised, ate well and had boundless energy. I've never smoked, I don't drink," said Elaine.

"Because I had never experienced any falls, no one suspected I was living with bone fractures. As a result, I'm not sure how long I have been living with osteoporosis."

Today, Elaine receives ongoing osteoporosis treatment and takes daily supplements, including vitamin D and calcium. She also wears a brace to support her back.

According to Elaine, an increase in public awareness of bone health is needed to help others to avoid sustaining painful fractures. She strongly supports Osteoporosis Australia's name change to 'Healthy Bones Australia', and the new, improved website to help relay this message to the community.

"We all need healthy bones, and the prevention of osteoporosis requires access to information about our bone health. It's so important."

"I hope the organisation's new name will attract more public interest in, and attention from those both wishing to learn how best to prevent bone loss before it occurs, and how to regain bone mass and strength," Elaine said.

"Our bones are so precious, and it's critical that we look after them."