

Personal stories: Living with poor bone health.

Introducing Renee who is a cancer survivor based in Geelong who sustained broken bones and was then diagnosed with osteoporosis.

In 2012, Renee, then aged 32, was diagnosed with stage 3 cervical cancer, and subsequently underwent a cancer treatment regime, involving chemotherapy, radiation therapy and a hysterectomy.

Renee experienced premature menopause (before age of 40) induced by her medical treatment. Although premature menopause can impact bone health, and is a risk factor for both osteopenia (low bone density), and osteoporosis, Renee was not advised about her bone health, nor told to visit an endocrinologist.

Although two bone mineral density (BMD) scans, in 2016 and 2020, respectively, revealed osteopenia, Renee was informed this condition was not cause for concern. However, a mere three days after her scan in 2020, a simple step off her back deck resulted in fractures in her left ankle, and a smaller fracture in her right foot.

Renee subsequently underwent surgery for her fractures which required plates and screws to repair the foot and ankle, and was diagnosed with osteoporosis by an endocrinologist following a plethora of tests and X-rays. Today, almost a year later, Renee is still recovering from her fall. She experiences pain, difficulty walking, and struggles to perform simple, daily tasks, such as visiting the supermarket, or taking her dog for a walk.

Renee is passionate about sharing her story, with a view to raising awareness about the seriousness of osteoporosis and to encourage Australians to act to prevent this disease.

This is Renee's story.

Following her diagnosis of cervical cancer in 2012, and ensuing treatment regime, Renee was thrust into early menopause, and subsequently developed osteopenia. What should have proven a harmless step off her back deck one day in February 2020, resulted in multiple fractures in her left ankle, and a smaller fracture in her right foot.

"After undergoing surgery to have plates and screws inserted into my left foot, the surgeon commented on the weakness of my bones, and explained I was osteoporotic. He also mentioned the surgery took longer than expected, because every time he tried to fix a bone, it wanted to split," said Renee.



Renee describes living with osteoporosis as “life changing, but not in a good way”, given the disease has severely impacted her independence post- surgery.

“I was a very independent person before fracturing, but was suddenly wheelchair-bound for several months thereafter.

“My fractures were so significant, I couldn’t walk properly. I’m still experiencing persistent pain. Basic tasks, such as visiting the supermarket, taking my dog for a walk, and walking up and down stairs, remain difficult to this day, because I still can’t walk around properly,” Renee said.

Since her diagnosis of osteoporosis in February 2020, Renee has been on osteoporosis treatment and calcium and vitamin D supplements, to help manage her bone health.

“I have regular physiotherapy and other treatments to progress my recovery, but I’m living with an injury that takes substantial time to heal. Almost 12 months have passed since I fractured my bones, and every day is still a struggle,” said Renee.

Despite experiencing early menopause, Renee was not advised to focus on her bone health, nor was she referred to an endocrinologist prior to fracturing.

“Had I been told at the outset that my bone health needed attention, I could have taken actions to help protect my bones. Even simple steps like taking vitamin D and calcium supplements, and doing weight bearing exercises, could have made things less severe, with fewer complications,” Renee said.

According to Renee, Osteoporosis Australia’s rebranding as ‘Healthy Bones Australia’ is important, to heighten public awareness about maintaining healthy bones.

“I now know some cancer treatment can impact bone health, and following my personal experience with fractures, I want raise awareness about the seriousness of osteoporosis, to help prevent, or better manage the disease in others.

“Osteoporosis Australia’s rebranding to Healthy Bones Australia will hopefully focus more attention on bone health and encourage people to pay greater attention to their bone health, and the risk factors that can lead to osteoporosis,” said Renee.

Renee encourages all Australians to consider their bone health, stressing “prevention is key.”