

Media recommendations for reporting on osteoporosis and its treatment

Who are these recommendations for?

- These recommendations can be used by anyone producing media about osteoporosis or its treatment.
- This includes journalists, reporters, media and communications teams and scientists engaging with the press about research.
- These recommendations are relevant for a wide range of media including print and broadcast news media.

These recommendations may also be helpful for:

- Any individuals communicating about osteoporosis or its treatment, including healthcare professionals.
- Verbal as well as written communications.

These recommendations cover four areas:

1. What is osteoporosis?
2. Positive living and preventing broken bones.
3. Making information clear and accessible.
4. Signposting.

When reporting on osteoporosis, ask yourself:



What is osteoporosis?

Be clear about what osteoporosis is:

- by using simple phrases to describe the condition. For example: *“Osteoporosis is a condition where bones lose strength, making them more likely to break.”*

Emphasize:

- osteoporosis is a serious condition which may impact on a person’s physical, mental, and social well-being.
- osteoporosis is not just a normal or inevitable part of ageing: osteoporosis is manageable, and the risk of broken bones can be reduced.
- osteoporosis affects both men and women, people of all ages, and people of all ethnicities. It is a common misconception that osteoporosis affects only older white women.
- the importance of thinking about bone health and considering our chances of osteoporosis and broken bones.



Explain:

- there are factors that may increase our chances of getting osteoporosis. Some factors we cannot control, for example, family history, age, being female, and history of broken bones. Some factors we can control, for example, eating a varied diet and regular physical activities. Other factors which increase our chances of a broken bone may include having to take certain medications, reduced levels of sex hormones, having an eating disorder, hyperparathyroidism, and other conditions.
- osteoporosis is a silent condition, and this means that people living with the condition show no signs or symptoms and experience pain only after a fracture has occurred. A common misconception is that osteoporosis without a broken bone causes people pain.

Encourage:

- your audience to check their risk of osteoporosis using the Royal Osteoporosis Society risk checker: www.theros.org.uk/risk-check



Positive living and preventing broken bones



When reporting on osteoporosis, emphasise:

- although the condition is serious, we can lower our chances of broken bones through a combination of drug treatment and lifestyle options.
- people living with osteoporosis can lead healthy active lives.

If reporting on new or potential drug treatment options:

- highlight that there are many choices now available to people and encourage readers to seek advice from their GP.
- provide a balance of information about the benefits and possible side effects of osteoporosis drugs.
- signpost your readers to current and accurate information about osteoporosis drug treatment options which can be found through the Royal Osteoporosis Society website: www.theros.org.uk/information-and-support/osteoporosis/treatment/



When talking about groups of people living with osteoporosis:

- avoid using “othering” language like “they” and “them” as it can create a sense of generalising about people living with osteoporosis. Using this type of language may also lead to feelings of isolation amongst people living with the condition. This may also create a sense of blame for the condition and lead people to believe they are not at risk of the condition.
- use inclusive language like “we” and “us”. For example: *“It is important that we all consider our chances of osteoporosis or having a broken bone”*.
- avoid referring to people with osteoporosis as “sufferers” and “victims” as this can elicit a sense of doom and fear about the future of someone newly diagnosed or living with the condition.
- use person-centred language: Instead of saying someone “suffers” from the condition, describe people as “living with” the condition.

When including expert opinions:

- consider also including perspectives from people with lived experience of osteoporosis.



Making information clear and accessible

Avoid:

- using technical language and jargon. For example, avoid describing osteoporosis at the cellular level.
- vague descriptions which may cause confusion. For example, *“keep in shape”*. Ask yourself: What does this mean and how what will my audience think this means?
- using emotive words to describe bones for example avoid words like *“crumbling”* and *“disintegrating”*.
- using different terms to describe a broken bone or fracture e.g. *“break”*, *“crack”*, or *“brittle bones”*.

Do:

- use simple language e.g. *“osteoporosis is a condition where bones lose strength, making them more likely to break”*.
- keep language consistent when describing broken bones and/or explain that broken bones and fractures are the same thing.
- use the term *“broken bone”* when describing a fracture, and/or explain that a fracture and a broken bone are the same thing.



Using images

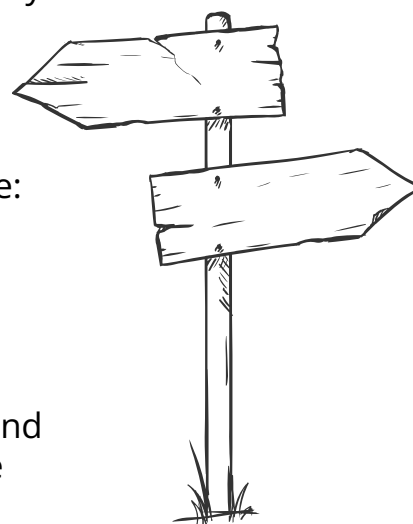
- Avoid the use of images which include stereotypes about ageing.
- Include images which represent a diverse range of people in a positive light.
- For more information, see the Age Without Limits Age-positive image library which contains over 3,000 images available for free - www.agewithoutlimits.org/image-library



Signposting

More information for your readers

- Visit and signpost to the Royal Osteoporosis Society website - www.theros.org.uk, Versus Arthritis - www.versusarthritis.org, and Age UK - www.ageuk.org.uk.
- Signpost audiences to The Royal Osteoporosis Society free helpline to speak to a specialist nurse: 0808 800 0035 nurses@theros.org.uk
- Readers may also feel Versus Arthritis Online Community - www.versusarthritis.org/get-help/online-community, is useful for information and discussion about osteoporosis.
- If reporting on research, your readers may also find it useful if you provide a link to the paper you are citing, if available.



More information for journalists/reporters

Unsure about anything?

- Get in touch with the Royal Osteoporosis Society media and communication team - www.theros.org.uk/what-we-do/media-centre/

Other media recommendations you might find useful:

- Media guidelines for reporting on ageing and older age (Centre for ageing better) - www.ipso.co.uk/media/2154/media-guidelines-for-reporting-on-ageing-and-older-age.pdf
- Reporting on older people guide (Age Scotland) - www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-scotland/media/media-documents/making-ageism-old-news---reporting-on-older-people-guide---age-scotland-2022.pdf
- Media Guidelines for reporting on eating disorders (Beat Eating Disorders) www.beat.contentfiles.net/media/documents/Beat_Media_Guidelines.pdf

How were these recommendations developed?

These recommendations were developed as part of a PhD studentship funded by Versus Arthritis, using the results of research undertaken at Keele University. Recommendations have been co-designed with people living with osteoporosis, healthcare professionals and representatives from Versus Arthritis and the Royal Osteoporosis Society.

Developed by: Rosie Jones PhD student Keele University (e.r.jones@keele.ac.uk), Professor Clare Jinks (c.jinks@keele.ac.uk), Dr Siobhan Holohan (s.holohan@keele.ac.uk), Professor Zoe Paskins (z.paskins@keele.ac.uk)

Found these recommendations helpful? Please email your feedback to: health.iau@keele.ac.uk

