

Carole, 71

Retired business consultant who has sustained multiple bone fractures & loss of height, Glenning Valley, *CENTRAL COAST NSW*

Retired business consultant, Carole, 71, Glenning Valley, Central Coast NSW, was diagnosed with osteopenia (low bone density) just after her 50th birthday.

The news came as a huge shock to Carole, who had long subscribed to a healthy diet and exercise.

Carole has since sustained multiple bone fractures, including excruciating fractures in her lower spine, resulting in a loss of nine centimetres in height, and creates difficulty walking or standing for long periods of time.

Carole spent the ensuing 10 years moving in and out of hospital emergency departments after fracturing multiple bones, including her wrist, ribs, sternum, feet, and ankles – each of which was treated as an individual break. During this period, she grew increasingly wary of sustaining further injury and bone re-fracture.

This is Carole's story.



"My doctor had been nagging me for a while to undergo a bone mineral density test.

"So when I celebrated my 50th birthday in 2004, I finally agreed to have the test to mark this significant milestone in my life," said Carole.

To her complete surprise however, the results revealed Carole was living with osteopenia in both her spine and her hips.

"I was shocked to receive the results because I've always maintained such a healthy, active life.

For years I've attended the gym, eaten well and worked hard to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

"I also have no known family history of the disease, and I had minimal understanding of the disease back then – I mistakenly thought it was only a disease of older people. I never thought someone of my age could develop osteopenia," said Carole.

On March 17, 2015, while cleaning out a garden drain, Carole was startled by a lizard that jumped from her deck onto her shoulder, to which she jolted suddenly in response.

"I was surprised, so moved abruptly, and this small reaction led to severe pain," Carole said.

This minor incident spurred a long and painful journey for Carole who, not long after, began to experience pain in her groin. After visiting her GP for professional advice, Carole was subsequently referred to several specialists who examined her, searching for clues in her bowel, intestine and for other potential causes of her pain. Meanwhile, Carole continued to live with serious pain for the ensuing three months.

On May 27, 2015, she was hospitalised, underwent further tests treatment for her intestine, and was discharged two days later.

The following week however, while still in excruciating pain, Carole visited her GP and was referred to a back specialist, a gastroenterologist and a gynaecologist. After visiting the gynaecologist the following day, Carole was immediately admitted to hospital.

The hospital's gastroenterologist reviewed some scans which revealed she had fractures in her spine – the actual source of her ongoing and severe pain!

Carole spent the following three months hospitalised, while a long-term pain management regime was developed, and she regained mobility.

"I was in hospital and then in rehabilitation. My first round of rehabilitation went poorly however, and I fractured a few more bones in my spine as a result," said Carole.

After eventually returning home, Carole continued rehabilitation to rebuild the strength of her spine. She describes the entire experience as "an extremely painful ordeal," due to the initial misdiagnosis of her spinal fractures and subsequent treatment regime, which was further compounded by her lack of personal understanding of osteoporosis at the time.

"It was an extremely debilitating and painful time for me, and my life in so many ways.

"I experienced a lot of pain, lost height due to the damage I sustained to my lower spine," Carole said.

After being diagnosed with osteoporosis, Carole's endocrinologist changed her medication. She has since tried various treatment options and has finally found significant results with her most recent treatment.

"You just don't realise, or recognise, the damage that fractures can cause until they occur," Carole said.

"Living with pain caused by permanent damage to your spine, changes your life."

Carole has lost a total of nine centimetres in height due to sustaining multiple spinal fractures.

Now aged 70, she visits her osteoporosis specialist regularly for ongoing monitoring and treatment.

"I see my specialist often now. Protecting my bones from re-fracture is my highest priority.

"My life changed dramatically because of the fractures I've sustained. Daily tasks were very difficult, such as preparing a meal, hanging out washing, or weeding the garden, as this could prove disastrous for my spine," said Carole.

Despite all that Carole has endured to date, had she not been diagnosed with osteoporosis when she was, her situation could have been worse. And her most recent treatment is helping protect her bones and has given her new confidence due to the positive results.

She is now a strong advocate for educating health professionals to make bone health a priority. She also supports greater community awareness of osteoporosis prevention and better access to osteoporosis treatments.

"It's time that people took their bone health very seriously and recognised that by taking action sooner rather than later, painful fractures may be avoided.

"Bone Health must become a higher priority for doctors and the community at large, so people are diagnosed early, and are able to avoid painful fractures," Carole said.

"It is important people seek health information from credible and trusted sources, and in the case of bone health, reputable sources such as Healthy Bones Australia,"

"In my personal experience and listening to the stories of others, there is a common theme of misdiagnosis and a lack of knowledge of the impact and treatment of this disease. It has to change."

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