



# HEALTH UPDATE

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## Depo-Provera<sup>®</sup> and Bone Loss

In November 2004, the FDA started requiring an announcement ("black box warning") in the prescription information distributed with Depo-Provera<sup>®</sup> about the loss of bone mineral density. Here is the "black box":

**Women who use Depo-Provera Contraceptive Injection may lose significant bone mineral density. Bone loss is greater with increasing duration of use and may not be completely reversible. It is unknown if use of Depo-Provera Contraceptive Injection during adolescence or early adulthood, a critical period of bone accretion, will reduce peak bone mass and increase the risk for osteoporotic fracture in later life. Depo-Provera Contraceptive Injection should be used as a long-term birth control method (e.g. longer than 2 years) only if other birth control methods are inadequate.**

### Why is bone density important?

- Bone density reflects the strength of bones and their ability to resist fracture. Under normal conditions, the density and strength of women's bones increases during their teens, 20's, and 30's. Fractures in young healthy women generally only occur when the bones are subjected to great stress, as in sports or motor vehicle accidents.
- At the time of menopause (about age 50), bone density declines, bones become fragile, and the risk of fracture increases over time. Besides aging, certain other factors hasten bone loss and increase the risk of fracture. Those factors include inadequate dietary calcium, smoking,

alcohol use, eating disorders, and certain diseases and medications. In women with fragile bones, even minor stress (such as simply bumping into things) can cause a fracture.

### **I am using Depo-Provera & I like it. What does this mean for me?**

- All we know now is that Depo-Provera causes bones to lose density as measured on a bone density test. The longer a woman uses Depo-Provera, the more bone loss she is likely to have. We know from previous studies that older women whose bones have lost a great deal of density experience many more fractures than women with normal bone density. We do not know whether or not the bone loss caused by Depo-Provera in young women will result in increased fracture risk later in life.

### **What should I do?**

- If you have been using Depo-Provera for less than 2 years, the expected bone loss is minor and appears to be at least partially reversible through diet and exercise once Depo-Provera is stopped.
- If you have been using Depo-Provera for 2 years or more, you should talk with your healthcare provider about other birth control methods. If you can select another method that works well for you, you should consider switching to that method. If other methods are unacceptable, make sure you understand the risks of continuing on Depo-Provera. Also, make sure your diet includes adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D (request handouts for additional information), and get plenty of weight-bearing exercise like walking, running, or team sports.