

Title: Understanding compression fractures and treatment

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Abstract: Compression fractures are commonly seen in the elderly and are one of the most dreaded complications of osteoporosis. These fractures occur in the bones of the spine (vertebrae) and result in collapse or loss of the height of the vertebrae. The most common symptom of compression fractures is back pain. The pain symptoms typically resolve on their own, but may take several months. Many physicians and patients will choose conservative medical pain management. However, recent studies have shown kyphoplasty to effective treatment option for patients with particularly severe symptoms. Kyphoplasty is a procedure which involves placing a needle in the vetebrea, expanding it with a balloon and filling it with cement.

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Compression Fractures

Recognizing symptoms

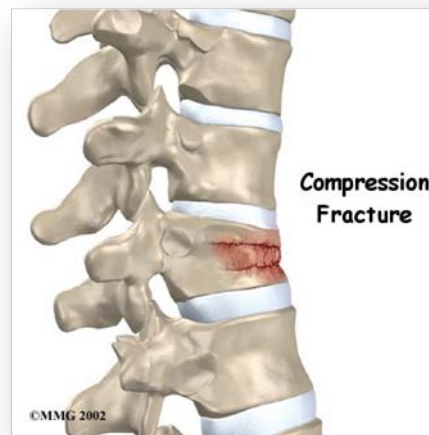
Understanding causes and treatment



Information for
Patients and
Families

Question: What is a Compression fracture?

Answer: Compression fractures affect the spine. The spine consists of several bones called vertebrae which are stacked on one another. Together, these bones hold our posture and bear much of our weight. In people with thin or weak bones (as in the case of osteoporosis) these vertebrae can sometimes collapse or lose height. When this happens, we call it a compression fracture.



Question: What are the symptoms?

Answer: Compression fractures often cause severe back pain, usually affecting the middle and lower spine. If someone has several fractures they can cause reduced body height and changes in posture.

Question: How do they happen?

Answer: As we age, our bones naturally become thinner. Some people have much more thinning of the bones than others. When this happens we call it osteoporosis. People with Osteoporosis are at the greatest risk for compression fractures. These fractures often happen after a patient with weak bones falls or is injured. However, in many cases very little or no force is needed to cause a bone to break. Because of this, some patients do not remember the event that caused the fracture.

Question: How can they be prevented?

Answer: Preventing compression fractures means preventing osteoporosis. Exercise, vitamin D and calcium are very important for our bones. Your doctor may also prescribe certain medications that specifically work to strengthen the bones.

Question: What is the treatment?

Answer: In many patients the painful symptoms go away with time. This may take several months. Your doctor may prescribe pain medications to help you cope with the pain until then. Physical therapy can also be helpful

In some patients, the pain can be quite bad or may not improve over time. These patients may consider a procedure called kyphoplasty.

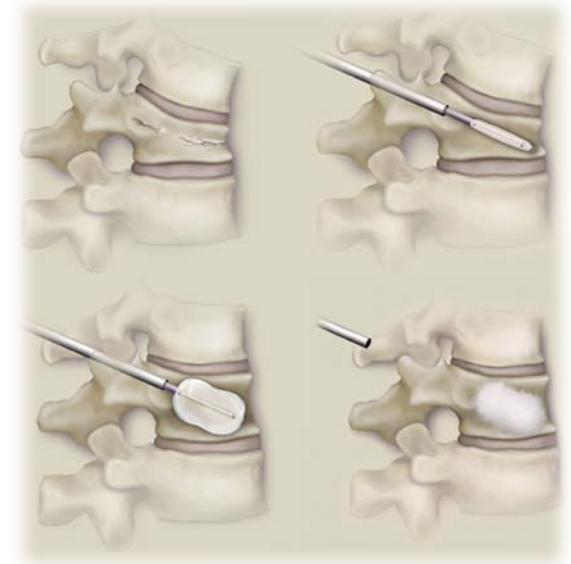
Question: What is kyphoplasty?

Answer: Kyphoplasty is a procedure done to restore the shape and strength of the broken vertebra. It has been shown to improve pain and mobility in people with compression fractures.

The procedure involves placing a needle into the crushed bone of the spine. A balloon is then passed through the needle and blown up inside the vertebra to restore height to this bone. Then a liquid cement mixture is pushed inside which later hardens.

Question: Is kyphoplasty Safe?

Answer: Kyphoplasty is quite safe. However, occasional complications do occur such as infection and cement leakage. Complications are almost never life threatening.



This drawing shows the steps in kyphoplasty. First, a needle is put into the damaged bone. Then, a balloon is blown up to give the vertebra a more normal height. The last step is putting cement into the bone.

