



Original Article

Cystic fibrosis bone disease: Pathophysiology, assessment and prognostic implications

Abeer Anabtawi^{a,*}, Trang Le^b, Melissa Putman^c, Vin Tangpricha^{d,e}, Maria Luisa Bianchi^f^a Department of Internal Medicine, Division of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism, University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, KS, USA^b Departments of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, Division of Endocrinology, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA^c Divisions of Endocrinology, Boston Children's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, USA^d Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism, & Lipids, Department of Medicine, Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA, USA^e The Atlanta VA Medical Center, Decatur, GA, USA^f Experimental Laboratory for Children's Bone Metabolism Research, Istituto Auxologico Italiano IRCCS, Milano, Italy

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ABSTRACT

Cystic fibrosis bone disease (CFBD) is a common long-term complication of cystic fibrosis (CF) that can lead to increased fractures and significant morbidity and mortality in this patient population. CFBD pathophysiology remains poorly understood and is likely to be multifactorial. There are limited studies evaluating diagnostic tools and tests to guide therapeutic decisions and monitoring of CFBD. This review will present and discuss the current evidence.

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1. Background

Improvements in clinical care over last 40 years have led to increased survival in patients with cystic fibrosis (CF). With improving life expectancy, the prevalence of long-term complications including cystic fibrosis bone disease have increased. Studies have reported the prevalence of CFBD between 13 and 34% [1–4], with higher incidence of non-vertebral and vertebral fractures, up to 20% and 27% respectively, compared to healthy individuals [4–6]. Rib and vertebral fractures can result in significant pain and long-term deformities leading to ineffective chest physiotherapy, decrease in airway clearance, and eventually increase in pulmonary exacerbations and rapid decline in lung function (Fig. 1) [7,8]. A recent study of 42 adult patients with CF waiting for lung transplantation reported low bone mineral density (BMD) (Z-score < -2.0) in 52.4% and one or more fragility fractures in 45.2% [9]. Severe CFBD can be an exclusion criterion for lung transplantation in some centers [10].

2. Pathophysiology

Bone is composed of an outer dense cortex (cortical bone) and an inner network of plates and rods (trabecular bone). The distal ends of long bones and the vertebral bodies are mainly made of trabecular

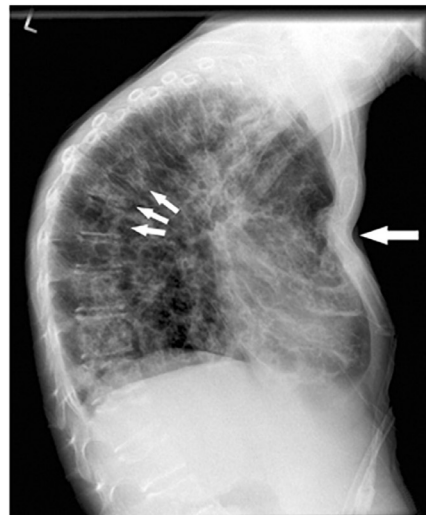
bone, while the shafts of long bones are mainly cortical bone. In the first phases of life during childhood and adolescence, bones grow and change until the adult shape and dimensions are attained. This process is called “bone modeling”. Throughout life, the bone tissue is continuously renewed by a recurring process of osteoclast-mediated bone resorption and osteoblast-mediated bone formation, that replaces old and damaged bone with new bone. This process is called “bone remodeling”. The generic term “bone turnover” is also used to indicate the continuous renewal of bone that occurs throughout life. The balance between osteoclasts and osteoblasts activity is critical to the strength and integrity of bone. In any condition of excess bone resorption, bone minerals are more rapidly lost in the trabecular bone, while the loss of cortical bone occurs later. Such conditions weaken the bone structure and lead to a higher risk of fracture [11,12].

Peak bone mass is achieved in early adulthood and is influenced by many factors including nutrition, physical activity, gender, timing of puberty, and body composition [11]. Factors that contribute to bone strength include bone shape and size, bone mineral density, bone microarchitecture, and balance between bone formation and resorption [12,13]. Imbalance in any or a combination of these factors can lead to increased risk of fractures [14]. These and other factors contribute to the development and severity of CFBD [15] (Table 1).

Bone turnover is a very complex process involving many different factors: hormones, cytokines, and other local factors. The receptor activator of nuclear factor kappa B (NF-κB) ligand (RANKL) is an important

*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: aanabtawi@kumc.edu (A. Anabtawi).



P Latzin et al. Thorax 2005;60:616

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THORAX

Fig. 1. X-ray of vertebral fracture and kyphosis, adapt from Latzin P, Griese M, Hermanns V, et al Sternal fracture with fatal outcome in cystic fibrosis. *Thorax* 2005;60:616).

cytokine for osteoclast activation and bone resorption. It is inhibited by osteoprotegerin (OPG) which is a protein produced by osteoblasts [16]. Reactive oxygen species (ROS) which are often elevated in individuals with CF [17] are important for RANKL-induced osteoclast differentiation, activity, and potentially for increased bone resorption [18]. Oxidative stress can also induce osteoblast apoptosis and dysfunction [19].

2.1. Cystic fibrosis transmembrane regulator (CFTR) dysfunction

CF is caused by defects in the cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR) gene. Most individuals with CF carry 2 mutations which cause severe CFTR dysfunction (such deltaF508), while others bear at least one mild CFTR mutation conferring a small amount of residual function. The level of residual CFTR function may directly or indirectly impact the development of CFBD. A prospective cross-sectional study of 88 adults with CF found significantly lower Z-scores at the spine and femoral neck in patients with homozygous or heterozygous F508del mutation compared to those without F508del mutation. Multiple linear regression analysis also showed F508del to be independently associated with lower bone mineral density at both spine and femoral neck [20]. Dif et al. reported significantly lower bone mineral density and altered microarchitecture demonstrated by decreased cortical width and trabecular thickness in mice with inactivation of both copies of CFTR gene compared to heterozygous and normal mice despite similar nutritional status [21]. CFTR's dysfunction can negatively affect bone formation via decreased osteoblast numbers and maturation [22]. A study by Stalvey et al. using CFTR knockout mice (cfr^{-/-}) found significantly

decreased OPG production from cfr^{-/-} compared to cfr^{+/+} osteoblasts, resulting in higher RANKL/OPG ratio and increased osteoclastogenesis [23]. Studies have shown decrease in bone formation rate, lower BMD and abnormal bone microarchitecture in deltaF508 CFTR mice compared to controls independent of age and sex [24–26].

2.2. Vitamin D, vitamin K deficiency and calcium malabsorption

Severe CFTR dysfunction also causes exocrine pancreatic insufficiency which in turn causes intestinal malabsorption of fat-soluble vitamins K and D, both of which are important for bone health. Vitamin K is essential for carboxylation of osteocalcin and bone formation [15]. Vitamin D is essential for intestinal calcium absorption. Vitamin D deficiency results from insufficient skin synthesis due to reduced sunlight exposure, as well as from decreased intake of vitamin D-containing foods/supplements and intestinal malabsorption [27]. Since native vitamin D requires a 2-step activation in liver and kidney, chronic diseases of these organs such as CF related liver disease, can also cause vitamin D deficiency. Low vitamin D levels impair calcium absorption which may result in secondary hyperparathyroidism and increased bone resorption, and can contribute to low bone density in patients with CF [28].

2.3. Malnutrition, inability to achieve expected peak bone mass and delayed puberty

Malnutrition in individuals with CF can negatively affect bone mineralization, hampering the achievement of an optimal peak bone mass which can lead to a precociously reduced bone density in adult life [29]. Brookes et al. [30] evaluated bone density and strength using peripheral Quantitative CT (pQCT) in 53 prepubertal and pubertal patients with CF. At puberty, they found significantly lower bone mineral content at the tibia in both males and females, and significantly lower bone strength in females at the tibia and radius when compared to healthy controls. Bone strength parameters were not compromised before puberty in these patients. These changes were thought to be likely due to decreased bone strain load due to malnutrition and low muscle mass [30].

Sex steroids and puberty are important for accruing and maintaining bone mass. Evidence shows reduced BMD in patients with sex steroid hormone deficiency and delayed puberty [31]. Much as in healthy teens, puberty has been shown to be a strong stimulus for increase in

Table 1
Factors contributing to CFBD.

- | |
|---|
| 1. CFTR dysfunction |
| 2. Vitamin D, Vitamin K deficiency |
| 3. Calcium deficiency |
| 4. Malnutrition |
| 5. Delayed puberty and hypogonadism |
| 6. Decreased physical activity |
| 7. Respiratory infections and systemic inflammation |
| 8. Exogenous glucocorticoids |
| 9. Cystic fibrosis related diabetes |

bone density over time in teens and young adults with CF [32]. In a study of 191 men and women with CF, Rossini et al. found below normal sex steroid levels in 23% of the women and 27% of the men studied. Estradiol levels in women correlated with femur BMD. Later age at puberty correlated negatively with BMD at spine, hip and total body. Low testosterone levels correlated with vertebral fractures in men [33].

2.4. Decreased physical activity

Much as in those without CF, decreased physical activity in patients with CF can be associated with lower bone density. A study by Tejero Garcia S et al. examined physical activity in 50 young adult patients with CF using cardiopulmonary exercise and 6-min walk tests and found significant positive correlation between activity level and bone mineral density at the spine and femoral neck [34]. Regular weight bearing exercise can improve bone accrual in healthy children and potentially in children with CF [35].

2.5. Exogenous glucocorticoids

Patients with CF may frequently receive systemic glucocorticoids for treatment of pulmonary exacerbations as well as post lung transplant [36]. Treatment with glucocorticoids has been shown to increase bone loss [32]. Increased risk of fractures can be seen after as little as one month of treatment in high-risk populations even before decrease in bone density, indicating a negative effect on bone microarchitecture that is not detected by Dual energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DXA) [37]. Glucocorticoids decrease bone formation via accelerated apoptosis of osteoblasts and osteocytes; direct suppression of osteoblast formation as evidenced by decrease of bone formation markers (e.g. osteocalcin); as well as decreased production of local bone growth factors. Glucocorticoids also increase bone resorption by increasing production of osteoclasts via RANKL activation and OPG inhibition [38–41].

Glucocorticoids can impair intestinal calcium absorption and renal tubular calcium reabsorption, leading to hypercalciuria, secondary hyperparathyroidism and increased bone resorption [41]. Additionally, systemic glucocorticoids can decrease sex steroid hormone production as well as growth hormone secretion and action, which can further decrease bone mass [42–44]. Glucocorticoid induced hyperglycemia may also contribute to low bone mass (section 2.7 in this document).

2.6. Respiratory infections & systemic inflammation

Poor lung function in individuals with CF has been shown to correlate with low bone mass in both children and young adults with CF [32]. FEV1 can be a significant predictor of measures of bone quality and estimates of bone strength [45]. Recurrent pulmonary exacerbations have also been shown to be associated with low BMD in young adults with CF [46]. A prospective study by Shead EF et al. in 24 adults with CF during periods of infective pulmonary exacerbations demonstrated significant increase in osteoclast number, and activity and in bone resorption markers [47]. This is possibly mediated by increased inflammatory cytokines, as shown by significant positive correlation between number of osteoclasts and concentration of tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF- α), and between osteoclast activity and serum interleukin-6 (IL-6) [47].

2.7. Cystic fibrosis related diabetes (CFRD)

Hyperglycemia associated with CFRD can lead to decrease in bone density likely via increased frequency of pulmonary exacerbations and poor nutritional status. A retrospective study by Rana M, et al. evaluated 81 patients below 18 years of age with CF, found significantly lower BMD at lumbar spine and total body in patients with CFRD (14 patients) compared to those who had normal glucose. However, no significant correlation with fractures was found [48].

2.8. Other risk factors

Organ transplantation, major depression, frequent use of proton pump inhibitors, and chronic liver disease (all of which have increased prevalence in the CF population) have been shown to increase risk of osteoporosis in postmenopausal women [49]. This would indicate that these factors could potentially increase risk of bone loss in patients with CF, but no studies have examined this to date.

3. Diagnostic workup

Evaluation of CFBD and decision to start treatment should be based on careful history regarding all risk factors contributing to the disease, and documentation of previous fracture history as well as imaging and lab studies (Tables 2, 3).

3.1. Imaging

3.1.1. Dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA)

DXA is currently the gold standard for assessment of CFBD and guiding therapy for osteoporosis [1,15]. It has several advantages including easy availability, low cost and minimal radiation exposure. DXA uses the attenuation of X-ray beams of two different photon energies to differentiate bone tissues from soft tissues. Since DXA scans are 2-dimensional images, this technique measures the bone mineral content (BMC, in grams) and the bone area (in cm²) of a selected skeletal site (e.g. lumbar vertebrae, hip, distal forearm), and can only calculate an “areal” BMD (aBMD = BMC/projection area, in g/cm²), not a true density (g/cm³). For mathematical reasons, the areal BMD is dependent on bone size, and this is problematic in the longitudinal evaluation of growing patients (changing bone size) and in the comparison with healthy age-matched controls (possibly different body size, and consequently bone size). This difficulty can be overcome using special “corrections” [54,55]. Additionally, DXA is unable to differentiate between trabecular and cortical bone to assess bone quality and microarchitecture.

The evaluation of DXA BMD in adults is based on the T-score (the number of standard deviations that a patient's BMD differs from that of a reference population of healthy subjects around 25–30 years of age, i.e. the age of peak bone mass and lowest fracture risk). Before the attainment of peak bone mass, i.e. in children, adolescents and young adults, the T-score cannot be used, and the Z-score (the number of standard deviations that the patient's BMD differs from that of a reference population of age- and sex-matched healthy subjects) must be considered [55]. The European guidelines for CF also

Table 2
Imaging tools for evaluation of low bone mass and osteoporosis.

Characteristic	DXA	QUS	HR-pQCT	MRI
Sites measured	Spine, hip, forearm, total body	Heel, radius, tibia, phalanges	Radius, Tibia QCT: spine, hip	spine, hip, proximal femur
Measures BMD (volumetric)	Yes (areal) No	No	Yes	
Fracture prediction	Yes Limited	Yes Limited	Yes (no fractures data)	Not known
Cost	low	low	High	High
Availability	Yes	Yes	Not widely	Not widely
Portability	No	Yes	No	No
Radiation	Low	None	High	None
Can assess bone microarchitecture	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Validated for diagnosis and monitoring	Yes	No	Yes	No

Table 3
Laboratory evaluation of low bone mass and osteoporosis [1,15,49].

Laboratory studies for all patients:	
1. Complete blood count	
2. Chemistry (Creatinine, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus)	
3. Liver enzymes and total alkaline phosphatase ^a	
4. 25-OH vitamin D level	
5. Parathyroid hormone (PTH) ^b	
6. 24- h urine collection for calcium, creatinine ^c	
7. TSH ^d	
8. Sex steroid hormones (LH, FSH, estradiol (females), total testosterone(males)) ^e	
Other tests should be considered in selected patients:	
1. Free T4 (if altered TSH)	
2. Bone turnover markers (Formation markers: PINP, OC, BSAP), (Resorption markers: CTX, NTX) ^f .	
3. Growth hormone, IGF-1 ^g	
4. Prolactin ^h	
5. Screening for celiac disease (anti-transglutaminase antibodies (IgA and IgG) [86].	
6. Serum or urine protein electrophoresis to evaluate for multiple myeloma	
7. Tests for evaluation of hypercortisolism	
8. Evaluation for rheumatoid arthritis	
9. Test for HIV if indicated by clinical risk factors	
10. Tests for evaluation for systemic mastocytosis	

Abbreviations: PINP = N-terminal propeptide of type I procollagen. CTX = C-telopeptide of type I collagen. NTX = N-telopeptide of type I collagen, LH = luteinizing hormone, FSH = follicular stimulating hormone, IGF-1 = insulin like growth factor1, HIV = Human immunodeficiency virus.

- ^a screen for cystic fibrosis related liver disease.
- ^b an elevated PTH might suggest inadequate calcium intake or absorption or primary hyperparathyroidism.
- ^c 24-h urine calcium can help assure adequate calcium balance and rule out hypercalciuria.
- ^d Check for thyroid hormone overreplacement while on therapy or if there is clinical suspicion of thyrotoxicosis.
- ^e Evaluate for delayed puberty and hypogonadism.
- ^f One marker of formation and one of resorption should be chosen initially, then measured at suitable intervals for follow-up.
- ^g Growth hormone status can be helpful in children with compromised growth or to exclude acromegaly in adults.
- ^h As indicated by sex steroid hormone testing and clinical history.

recommend using the Z-score for premenopausal women and men under the age of 50 [15].

Screening recommendations for CFBD with DXA are reviewed in article 8 in this supplement “Treatment of Cystic Fibrosis Bone Disease: Current Knowledge and Future Directions”. In subjects younger than 20 years, DXA should be measured at lumbar spine (LS), typically L1 through L4, and Total Body less head (TBLH). Recent update of the International Society for Clinical Densitometry guidelines

indicated possible measurement of proximal femur in children with decreased weight bearing of the lower extremities or in children with chronic diseases who are at continued risk of decreased bone mass through adulthood. In adults DXA is measured at LS and proximal femur (hip) [15]. In children, adolescents, and young adults below 20 years of age, the diagnosis of “osteoporosis” should not be made based on the BMD Z-score alone, but also requires evaluation of fracture history. Osteoporosis is thus defined as a Z-score below -2.0 (i.e., aBMD 2 or more standard deviations below mean for age and sex), and a significant fracture history (low trauma fracture of a lower limb long bone, vertebral compression fracture, or two or more upper limb long bone fractures). The same applies to premenopausal women and men under the age of 50. In postmenopausal women and men above 50, osteoporosis is defined as a T-score less than or equal -2.5 (i.e., aBMD 2.5 or more standard deviations below mean of healthy young adults). Low-trauma vertebral or hip fracture in adults with CF regardless of the BMD can also define osteoporosis (Fig. 2) [15,49].

3.1.2. Tools complementary to DXA

Limitations with DXA have led to the emergence of complementary tools to improve its ability to assess bone microarchitecture and predict fractures [50]. Trabecular Bone Score (TBS) (Fig. 3.) is an index derived from standard LS DXA scans. Lower TBS values are associated with increased risk for major osteoporotic fractures in postmenopausal women and older men, independently of BMD values and other clinical risk factors [51].

TBS has been shown in several studies to be a BMD independent predictor of fracture risk in other high-risk groups like patients with diabetes, and those on chronic glucocorticoid therapy [52–54]. A recent retrospective study by our group showed correlation of TBS with lung function and BMD in young adult patients with CF [55]. This tool has been studied in children; however, more studies are needed to better validate the use of TBS in this population [56,57]. TBS has not been validated to initiate or monitor therapy for osteoporosis [58].

Vertebral fracture assessment (VFA) by DXA uses a lateral projection of the thoracic and lumbar spine (T4-L4) to detect vertebral fractures. It offers an image at a lower cost and less radiation compared to conventional radiography. The use of VFA in patients at high risk for fracture, such as patients with CF can reveal previously unknown vertebral compression fractures, identifying patients at high risk for future fractures and patients most likely to benefit from therapy. No studies have evaluated use of VFA in individuals with CF to date. Hip structural analysis (HSA) can also be obtained from DXA images of the hip using hip dimensions and mineral mass distribution of the hip to compute several dimensional parameters to evaluate hip strength. Only Hip Axial Length (HAL) parameter has been shown to be associated with hip fracture in postmenopausal

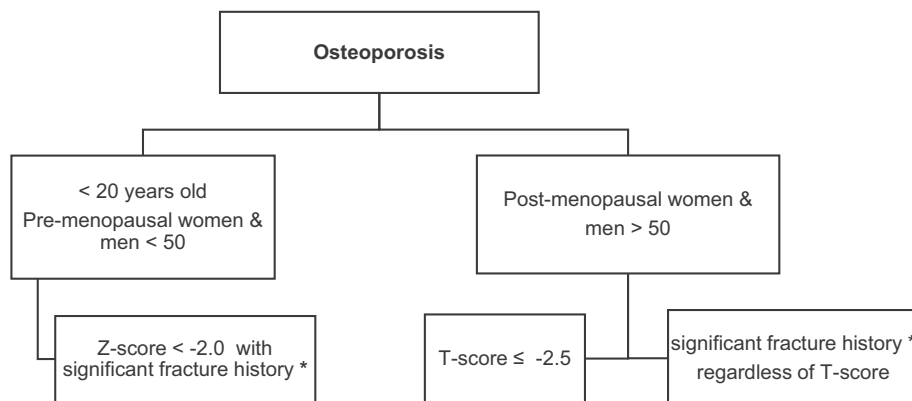


Fig. 2. Definition of osteoporosis in patients with cystic fibrosis [15].

* Low trauma fracture of a lower limb long bone, vertebral compression fracture, or two or more upper limb long bone fractures.

women [59]. There are no studies to evaluate this tool in patients with cystic fibrosis.

3.1.3. Fracture risk assessment tool (FRAX®)

FRAX® is an online calculator that can predict ten-year risk of major osteoporotic and hip fractures using several clinical risk factors, as well as femoral neck aBMD measured by DXA or Quantitative CT (QCT). Since FRAX® does not account for spine BMD, TBS can be applied to FRAX® to enhance fracture risk predictability. Unfortunately, the FRAX® calculator is only validated for use in people over 40 years of age and no studies have validated its use in patients with CF.

3.1.4. Quantitative computed tomography (QCT)

Quantitative Computed Tomography (QCT) measures volumetric bone mineral density (vBMD) in mg/cm^3 at the spine and hip, while peripheral QCT (pQCT) and High Resolution pQCT (HR-pQCT) measure vBMD at the tibia and forearm. QCT and pQCT can differentiate trabecular from cortical bone; hence they are able to assess bone microarchitecture, which cannot be done with DXA. There is some evidence that QCT could be useful for diagnosis and treatment monitoring of osteoporosis and to predict fractures in high risk groups [60].

QCT and HR-pQCT have been studied in children and adult patients with CF. Putman et al. compared 30 young adult patients with CF to 60 healthy controls using HR-pQCT at the radius and tibia and found compromised trabecular microarchitecture and lower total and trabecular vBMD and estimated bone strength at the tibia in patients with CF compared to controls after adjusting for BMI differences (Fig. 4.) [45]. In a subsequent study using Individual trabecula segmentation (ITS) analysis of HR-pQCT, patients with CF had fewer, thinner, and less connected trabecular plates and altered alignment of trabeculae after adjustment for BMI and aBMD [61]. These findings were also seen at the tibia independent of differences in limb length in patients with CF [62].

Studies evaluating QCT in children with CF showed variable changes in bone microarchitecture and strength compared to healthy controls, but consistently showed reduced bone strength and altered microarchitecture in older children when compared to healthy controls especially those with poor lung function and poor nutritional status [30,63–65].

Although QCT and HR-pQCT greatly improved our understanding of bone strength and microarchitecture, they are currently not widely available and remain mainly research tools. Additionally, they result in higher radiation exposure and are more expensive than DXA.

3.1.5. Quantitative ultrasound (QUS)

QUS can be done at peripheral sites only, i.e. calcaneus, radius, tibiae and phalanges. The advantages of QUS includes that it is inexpensive, portable and without radiation exposure. QUS essentially calculates two parameters: speed of sound (in meters per second, m/s), which is correlated with bone material properties such as elastic modulus and compressive strength, and broadband ultra-sound attenuation (decibels per megahertz, dB/MHz), which is related to BMD [66,67]. However, QUS is not validated for diagnosis or therapy monitoring of osteoporosis.

Calcaneal and radial QUS can be helpful to identify individuals with normal bone mass, however, further testing should be performed to confirm low bone mass if diagnosed by QUS [68,69]. A study on 172 adults with cystic fibrosis concluded that phalangeal QUS in contrast to calcaneal, radial QUS or DXA, can differentiate between CF patients with and without vertebral fractures [70].

3.1.6. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)

MRI for bone disease has not been studied in patients with CF. It can differentiate between cortical and trabecular bone and assess bone microarchitecture without exposure to ionizing radiation. However, it is not validated for diagnosis and monitoring osteoporosis therapy, and is time consuming and expensive compared to other available techniques [71].

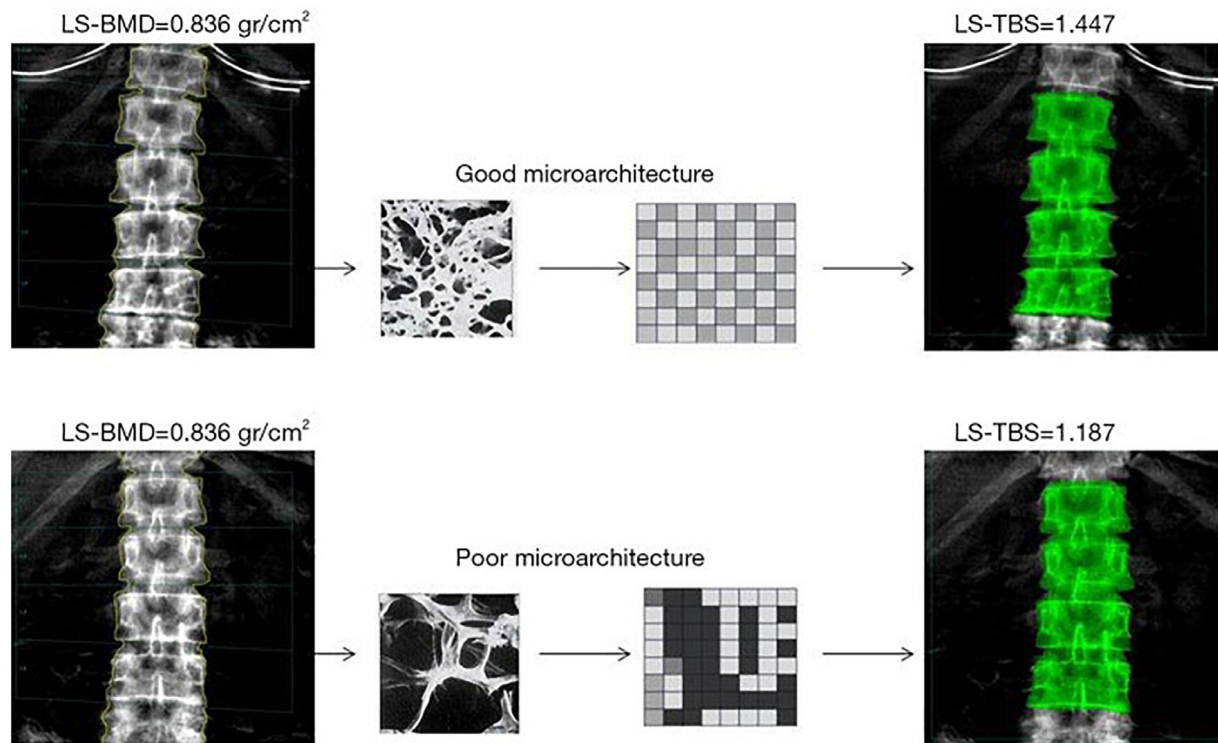


Fig. 3. DXA images of the spine, L1–L4 level of two individuals (top and bottom row); LS-BMD values are the same for both, LS-TBS in the second subject is clearly lower compared to the first subject, corresponding to deteriorated microarchitecture of the vertebral body. Adapted from L Oei, et al. *Quant Imaging Med Surg*. Dec 2016; 6(6): 680–698.

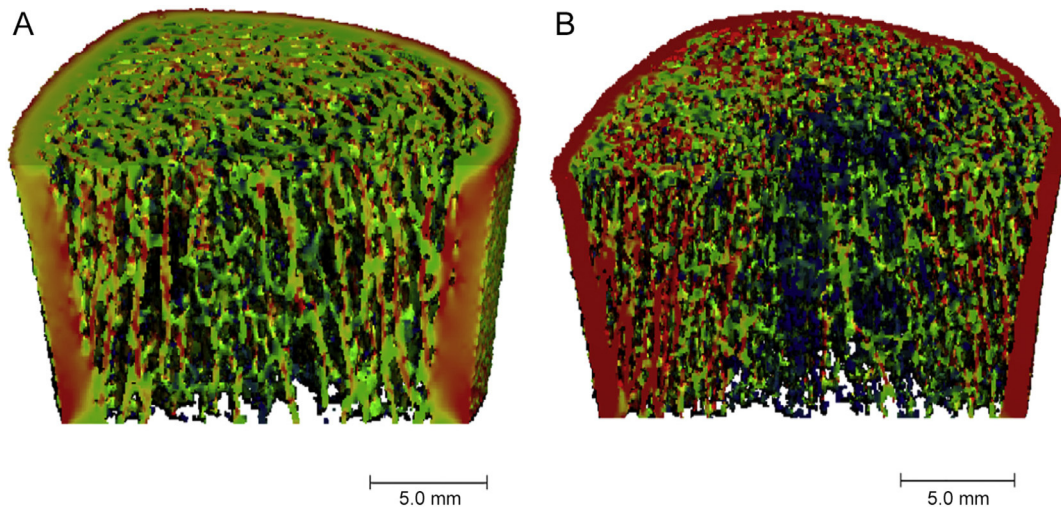


Fig. 4. Representative HR-pQCT images of the tibia of a (a) 23-year-old healthy woman and (b) 23 year old woman with CF.

3.2. Laboratory studies to evaluate secondary causes of osteoporosis

Osteoporosis guidelines recommend that laboratory exclusion of possible secondary causes of osteoporosis should be considered at initial evaluation and in cases with continued bone loss despite pharmacologic therapy [49,72]. This is also valid for CF patients.

Basic evaluation for all patients should include complete blood count, chemistry, liver enzymes and alkaline phosphatase, 25-hydroxy vitamin D level, parathyroid hormone, 24-h urine calcium and sex steroid hormones [15,49]. Additional testing can be considered in selected patients based on clinical history (Table 3).

Several “bone turnover markers” have been identified and can be measured in serum or urine. Bone resorption markers include serum C-terminal telopeptide of type 1 collagen (CTX) and urine N-terminal telopeptide of type 1 collagen (NTX). Bone formation markers include serum bone-specific alkaline phosphatase (BSAP), osteocalcin (OC), and amino-terminal pro-peptide of type I procollagen (PINP). Bone turnover markers are best measured fasting in the morning and are mainly used to evaluate the response to therapy. They are subject to variability due to several causes, including increase following fractures [73].

High bone turnover markers have been shown in some studies to predict fractures and rate of bone loss independent of BMD and estrogen levels in postmenopausal women [74,75]. Percent decrease in bone turnover markers levels of about 30–50% within 3–6 months of initiation of pharmacologic therapies, even before significant changes in BMD can be seen to indicate response to therapy. This makes bone turnover markers useful in treatment response monitoring, compliance and malabsorption assessment, and possibly prediction of fracture risk reduction while on therapy [76,77]. Bone turnover markers trend following completion of bisphosphonate therapy can potentially help decide the duration of drug holiday, although more studies are needed. Some studies showed increased levels of bone resorption markers and decreased bone formation markers in both children and adults with CF [28,78,79], especially during periods of infective exacerbations [47,80]; however, no studies to date have validated clinical use of bone turnover markers trend in management of CFBD.

4. Potential impact of CFTR modulation on bone pathophysiology

The negative effects of CFTR dysfunction on bone have led to increased awareness of potential CFTR modulator therapies for treatment and prevention of CFBD [81–83]. A study by Le Henaff et al. using miglustat, a medication partially restoring CFTR-dependent chloride transport in bone cells in deltaF508 mice, resulted in improved bone density and microarchitecture that was associated

with increased bone formation and decreased bone resorption at the lumbar spine and femur [81]. Velard et al. tested the effect of CFTR modulator C18 on cultured osteoblasts from four adolescents with CF and showed 34% reduction in RANKL/OPG mRNA ratio compared to untreated deltaF508 osteoblasts [82].

CFTR modulators can potentially improve CFBD directly by targeting abnormal bone turnover and decreased bone strength induced by CFTR dysfunction and indirectly by modifying overall disease outcomes including lung function, frequency of pulmonary exacerbations, CFRD, BMI and nutritional status [84]. CFTR modulators role in therapy of CFBD is reviewed in detail in article 8 in this supplement titled “Treatment of Cystic Fibrosis Bone Disease: Current Knowledge and Future Directions”.

5. Potential clinical trials and endpoints

Prediction of fractures and risk of development of CFBD with current available tools can be challenging in patients with CF. Fracture Risk Assessment Tool (FRAX[®]) has not been validated for use in individuals with CF. Clinical trials are needed to establish fracture risk assessment calculator specific for CF population combining clinical risk factors (including genotype), fracture history, and current imaging and lab studies. This can better help predict fractures and guide initiation of pharmacologic therapy. Clinical trials to evaluate role of bone turnover markers in monitoring response to pharmacologic therapy are also needed.

6. Future directions

Multiple imaging modalities are currently available to evaluate CFBD in clinical and research settings. DXA is the imaging modality recommended by guidelines to establish the diagnosis of CFBD, assess fracture risk and monitor response to therapy in individuals with CF. QCT can be useful to assess bone quality, strength in addition to bone density in selected patients; however, studies are needed to define best indications for QCT use in clinical practice due to concerns regarding radiation exposure and cost. Prospective studies are needed to evaluate benefit of other tools such as TBS in improving DXA predictability of fractures as seen in other high risk populations [52–54,85].

7. Clinical practice points

- Evaluation of CFBD and decision to start treatment should be based on careful history regarding all risk factors contributing to

the disease, documentation of previous fracture history as well as imaging and lab studies, and CF status (e.g. stable conditions, FEV1, planning of lung transplantation).

- DXA is currently the gold standard for assessment of CFBD and guiding therapy for osteoporosis.
- Current CF guidelines recommend screening with DXA starting at the age of 8–10 years.
- DXA measures areal BMD and not volumetric BMD and should be interpreted with care in the pediatric population as deficits in bone mass can be exaggerated in people with small body size.
- Z-score should be used for children, premenopausal women and men under the age of 50. T-score should not be used until after the age of 20 and only if Z-score is not available.
- The diagnosis of osteoporosis should not be made only based on BMD measurement and should consider fracture history.
- Basic evaluation for all patients should include complete blood count, chemistry (including renal function, electrolytes [calcium, magnesium, phosphorus], liver enzymes and alkaline phosphatase), 25-OH vitamin D level, PTH and 24-h urine calcium. Other labs can be considered in selected cases (Table 3).
- Bone turnover markers are not validated for diagnosis of osteoporosis and are mainly used to evaluate response to therapy.
- CFTR modulators can potentially improve CFBD via direct effect on bone and indirectly by affecting overall disease progression.

8. Summary

CFBD is a common long-term complication of CF. It is likely due to multiple risk factors including CFTR dysfunction, malabsorption of calcium, vitamin deficiencies, malnutrition, delayed puberty, prolonged treatment with glucocorticoids, recurrent pulmonary exacerbations and hyperglycemia. DXA is currently the gold standard technique recommended by CF guidelines for evaluation of CFBD [1,15]. The decision regarding initiation of pharmacologic therapy cannot be only based on DXA, but on clinical condition and fracture history. Other tools to evaluate CFBD and improve predictability and early detection of fractures including TBS and VFA have not been studied in patients with CF. QCT has improved our understanding of CFBD; however currently available as a research tool. Bone turnover markers can potentially be helpful in monitoring response to therapy in patients with CF although more studies are needed to evaluate their clinical utility in patients with CFBD. CFTR modulators may have a role in prevention and treatment of CFBD. Further studies are needed to assess whether treatment with CFTR modulators translates into clinical improvement in bone strength and decreased risk of fractures in individuals with CF.

Declaration of Conflict Interest

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