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OsteoAge Theory
Toward a Structural Biomarker of Biological Aging

Asst.Prof.Dr.Sopon S. Beaudoin
Bangkok, Thailand

1. Abstract

Background:

Chronological age has long been used as a universal metric of biological aging; however, it often fails to accurately reflect actual physiological decline. Recent research suggests that bone mass loss, particularly as measured by bone mineral density (BMD), may serve not merely as a consequence of aging, but as a predictive structural biomarker. Moreover, accumulating evidence indicates that changes in bone microarchitecture and marrow composition precede multisystem decline, including endocrine disruption, immune dysregulation, and cognitive impairment.

Objective:

This paper introduces OsteoAge Theory, a novel conceptual framework that proposes bone mass deviation—especially from age- and sex-adjusted normative BMD—as a primary indicator of biological age. The theory hypothesizes that structural skeletal decline acts as the initiating force for a downstream cascade involving marrow aging, hormonal signal failure, and systemic dysfunction.

Methods:

The paper synthesizes current findings from bone biology, marrow physiology, and geroscience, drawing from high-impact literature across the fields of skeletal endocrinology, aging biomarkers, and regenerative medicine. Theoretical modeling is used to illustrate a four-stage sequence:

1. Bone Mass Decline
2. Marrow Fatty Infiltration
3. Endocrine/Immune Dysregulation
4. Functional Biological Aging

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Results:

Theoretical alignment with existing studies reveals that:

- BMD loss predicts all-cause mortality more accurately than chronological age
- Hematopoietic-to-fatty marrow shift correlates with frailty and immune decline
- Osteocalcin and FGF23, key bone-derived hormones, decline with skeletal mass, suggesting structural signaling breakdown as a root of aging

Conclusion:

OsteoAge Theory posits that structural failure is not a symptom of aging—it is its origin. By redefining bone mass as a "biological clock face," the theory invites a fundamental reevaluation of how we define, measure, and intervene in the aging process. Future research may develop diagnostic tools such as the OsteoAge Index, capable of predicting actual biological age via skeletal biomarkers, ushering in a new era of structural geroscience.

2. Introduction

2.1 Chronological Age and Its Limitations

For decades, chronological age has served as the universal proxy for biological aging. It is printed on medical charts, forms the basis of retirement policies, and shapes health risk models. Yet, from a physiological standpoint, it is fundamentally flawed. Two individuals of the same age may differ dramatically in metabolic efficiency, immune resilience, cognitive function, and disease vulnerability. In geroscience, this disconnect has given rise to the concept of biological age—an attempt to capture one's actual internal state of aging.

Biological age has been explored through multiple biomarker systems: epigenetic clocks, telomere length, inflammatory profiles, and metabolic indices. While promising, these metrics are often non-structural, technically demanding, and biochemically volatile, limiting their application in longitudinal, population-based, or real-world settings.

2.2 The Search for a Structural Biomarker

Unlike transient molecular signals, bone mass—more specifically, bone mineral density (BMD)—offers a durable, quantifiable, and non-invasive

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measure that can be tracked over time. Epidemiological studies consistently demonstrate that low BMD is predictive of all-cause mortality, frailty, fracture risk, and immunosenescence, often independent of chronological age.

Yet, despite its clear correlations with systemic decline, bone mass has rarely been considered a primary aging biomarker. It is typically seen as a consequence rather than a cause, an orthopedic concern rather than a metabolic one. This conceptual oversight may have closed our eyes to the structural origins of aging.

2.3 Bone as an Endocrine and Regulatory Organ

In recent decades, a growing body of research has redefined bone as a hormonally active and systemically connected organ. The skeleton secretes osteocalcin, which influences insulin sensitivity, testosterone production, and even cognitive performance. It produces FGF23, which regulates phosphate metabolism and interacts with the renal and cardiovascular systems. Bone turnover and remodeling also interface directly with immune cell production through the marrow niche.

This osteosystemic network suggests that the skeleton is far more than a passive support structure—it is a dynamic signaler. As bone structure deteriorates, these signals weaken. In this light, bone mass decline is not merely a symptom of aging—it may be its initiating force.

2.4 Marrow Aging and Structural Collapse

Parallel to the decline in BMD, the bone marrow composition also shifts with age, from hematopoietic red marrow to lipid-rich yellow marrow. This fatty infiltration correlates with reduced immune cell output, increased systemic inflammation, and diminished regenerative capacity. Importantly, this marrow shift appears to occur before overt hormonal or cognitive changes, suggesting it may be part of an upstream collapse cascade.

When viewed together—bone mass decline and marrow degeneration—

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these changes form a coherent narrative: Structure deteriorates → signaling fails → systems decline

2.5 Introducing OsteoAge Theory

This paper proposes OsteoAge Theory: a new framework in geroscience that centers bone mass deviation as a structural biomarker of biological aging. Rather than treating bone loss as secondary, the theory suggests that skeletal decline precedes and predicts multisystem degeneration, and that BMD (normalized by age and sex) could be repurposed as a functional biological clock.

We aim to explore this theory through three primary lenses:

1. Integration of existing data correlating BMD with systemic aging
2. Mapping bone-derived signaling pathways to physiological function
3. Proposing a conceptual model for OsteoAge Index—a measurable, practical, and scalable tool for biological age estimation

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1 Bone as a Systemic Signal Center

Beyond its mechanical role, bone is now recognized as an active regulator of systemic physiology. The skeleton produces key signaling molecules, such as osteocalcin and FGF23, which influence energy metabolism, fertility, brain function, and cardiovascular health. These hormones do not act in isolation—they integrate skeletal health into the broader endocrine and immunologic landscape.

As bone density declines, production of these signaling molecules decreases. Osteocalcin levels, for example, fall with age and low BMD, correlating with reduced insulin sensitivity, cognitive slowing, and sarcopenia. This decline suggests a causal chain: structural weakening leads to biochemical silence.

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3.2 The Role of Marrow Transformation in Aging

Bone marrow is not static. With age, it undergoes a well-documented transition from red hematopoietic marrow to yellow fatty marrow. This transformation impacts hematopoiesis, immune competence, and regenerative capacity. Fatty marrow is metabolically inert and pro-inflammatory, contributing to immune aging (immunosenescence) and chronic low-grade inflammation (inflammaging).

Recent imaging studies and histopathological data have shown that marrow fat accumulation is inversely related to both bone mass and physical resilience. Significantly, this transformation may precede changes in hormonal profiles or clinical frailty, positioning it as an early marker of structural senescence.

3.3 The Concept of Structural Collapse as Aging Origin

Traditional models of aging focus on telomere attrition, mitochondrial dysfunction, or DNA damage. While valid, these theories often overlook structure. Without architectural integrity, signaling cannot be sustained, whether hormonal, neural, or immune.

OsteoAge Theory reorders the sequence:
- Structural Deterioration → Marrow Aging → Signal Decline → Functional Aging

In this framing, the skeleton is not the victim of aging—it is the first site of collapse. This idea is supported by studies showing that BMD loss predicts mortality better than glucose levels, lipid panels, or even inflammatory markers.

3.4 Integrative Geroscience and the OsteoAge Model

Geroscience aims to understand the biological mechanisms that drive aging across systems. Most current approaches emphasize molecular-level interventions. OsteoAge Theory complements this view by elevating structure—particularly the skeletal system—as both a foundation and a driver.

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The proposed OsteoAge Model links skeletal deterioration to systemic dysfunction through a three-layer axis:

1. Structural Layer – Bone Mass and Architecture
2. Marrow Layer – Composition and Hematopoietic Activity
3. Signaling Layer – Osteo-Hormones and Immune Output

Together, these create a cascade that not only predicts aging but may define it. This theory provides a foundation for developing non-invasive tools, such as the OsteoAge Index, which is designed to assess biological aging from the ground up.

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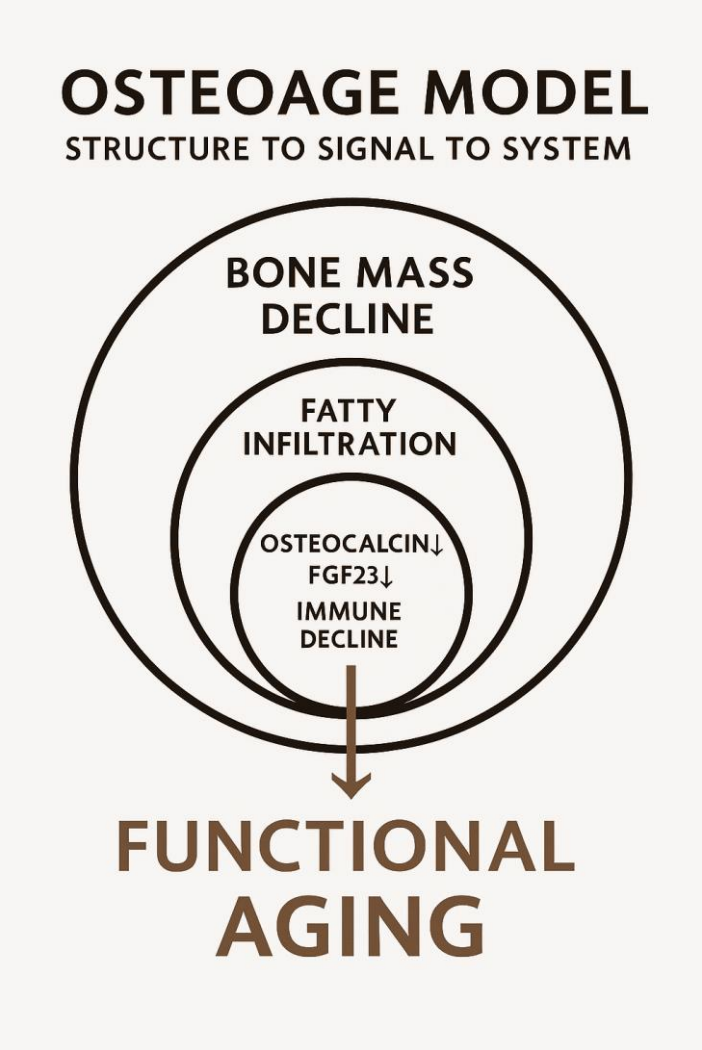

Figure 3.1: The OsteoAge Model – illustrating the theoretical cascade from bone mass decline to marrow transformation and systemic signaling breakdown, culminating in functional biological aging.

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4. Clinical and Diagnostic Potential

4.1 Rethinking Bone Density as a Diagnostic Tool

Bone mineral density (BMD), commonly measured by dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA), is traditionally used to assess the risk of osteoporosis and predict fracture probability. However, research increasingly suggests that BMD may offer far more than orthopedic insight. Longitudinal studies show that low BMD predicts not only fracture but also early mortality, frailty, immune weakness, and cognitive decline, even after adjusting for age, gender, and comorbidities.

Despite this, BMD remains underutilized as a systemic diagnostic marker. It is rarely incorporated into geriatric risk models or aging assessments and is often siloed within musculoskeletal specialties. OsteoAge Theory proposes a reconceptualization: that BMD is not simply an endpoint of aging but an upstream predictor—and potentially a surrogate marker for biological age itself.

4.2 The Need for a Structural Aging Index

Most biological age models rely on fluid-based biomarkers such as:
- Epigenetic methylation patterns (e.g., Horvath clock)
- Inflammatory cytokines (e.g., IL-6, TNF-α)
- Hormonal decline markers (e.g., DHEA-S, IGF-1)

While powerful, these tools are often expensive, time-sensitive, and limited in accessibility. In contrast, DXA is globally available, highly standardized, and already integrated into many health systems. It offers a unique opportunity to translate structural data into aging assessment.

OsteoAge Theory supports the development of a new diagnostic metric—the OsteoAge Index—derived from:
- Z-score deviation from population norms
- Rate of BMD loss over time

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- Bone quality parameters (e.g., trabecular pattern, cortical thinning)

This index could be validated against other aging markers and used in both clinical and preventive settings.

4.3 Applications Across Life Stages

The OsteoAge approach holds promise across age groups:

Population	Potential Use
Adolescents	Early detection of bone development issues; indicators of long-term growth and health potential
Adults (30–60)	Detection of silent bone loss; assessment of midlife biological aging
Seniors (60+)	Risk profiling for frailty, immune decline, and systemic degeneration

In each case, BMD could shift from a static snapshot to a dynamic indicator of regenerative reserve.

4.4 Case for Multisystem Prediction

Structural degradation often precedes:

- Marrow fat infiltration
- Osteocalcin reduction
- Cytokine imbalance
- Immunosenescence
- Mobility loss and sarcopenia

These patterns suggest that changes in bone density can act as an early systemic warning. If monitored correctly, OsteoAge profiling could enable early

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intervention before overt decline manifests, shifting medicine from a reactive to a preemptive approach.

4.5 A Practical and Scalable Metric

Unlike complex omics-based clocks, a DXA-derived index:

- Can be calculated from existing health infrastructure
- Requires no blood draw or cold chain storage
- Has high patient compliance
- Can be repeated for tracking over time

This makes the OsteoAge Index uniquely positioned as a population-scale aging marker, applicable in global settings and low-resource environments.

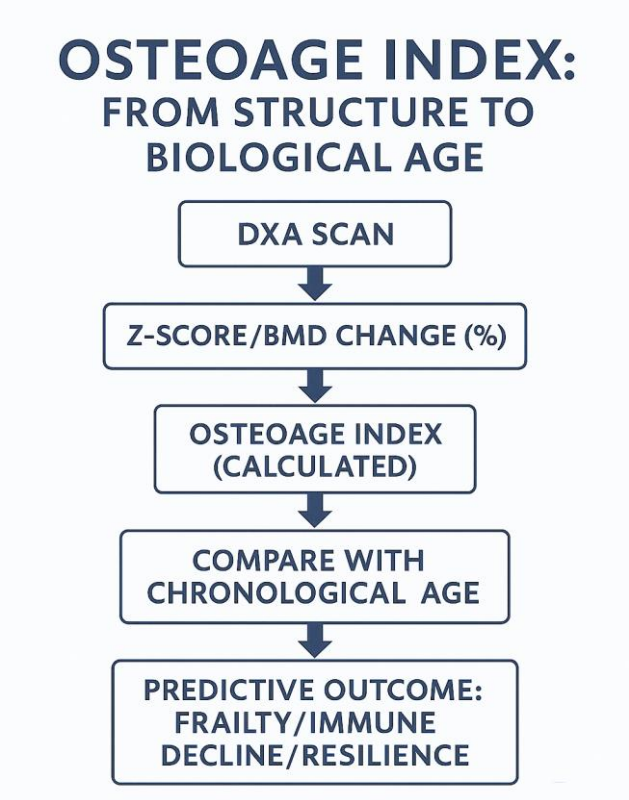

Figure 4.1: The OsteoAge Index flow — transforming skeletal data from DXA into a practical aging biomarker for predictive clinical use.

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5. Future Research Directions

5.1 Validation of the OsteoAge Index

While the OsteoAge Theory presents a novel framework for interpreting bone mass as a marker of biological aging, empirical validation is necessary to transform the concept into a clinically viable tool. The development and refinement of an OsteoAge Index will require:

- Cross-sectional studies comparing BMD-derived OsteoAge to established biological age clocks
- Longitudinal data tracking rate of bone loss and parallel changes in functional, cognitive, and metabolic decline
- Establishment of reference curves stratified by age, sex, and ethnicity

This research must also explore the thresholds of critical skeletal loss—points beyond which regenerative reversal is unlikely—and identify those that may serve as inflection points in the aging process.

5.2 Integration with Molecular and Epigenetic Biomarkers

Future studies should seek to integrate structural aging (BMD) with molecular aging signals, including:

- DNA methylation age
- Telomere attrition
- Mitochondrial efficiency
- Senescence markers (e.g., p16, β-galactosidase)

This multidimensional view may provide a comprehensive model of aging that encompasses both architectural and biochemical aspects.

5.3 Imaging the Marrow Clock

One of the most promising frontiers in OsteoAge research is the bone marrow interface. Future research should explore:

- MRI and spectroscopy to quantify fatty infiltration and red marrow depletion

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- Correlations between marrow phenotype and immune biomarkers
- Temporal relationships between marrow aging and endocrine dysregulation

A potential innovation would be the Marrow-Adjusted OsteoAge Score (MAOS)—an adjusted metric that includes both cortical density and marrow integrity.

5.4 Intervention Studies Targeting Bone as Primary

Most regenerative protocols initially target metabolic or cellular parameters. OsteoAge invites reverse engineering of rejuvenation, where interventions begin by restoring structure.

Pilot trials may include:

- Strontium-rich mineral supplementation
- Load-bearing mechanical stimulation
- Nutritional interventions prioritizing collagen, vitamin K2, and magnesium

Measured outcomes should include not just BMD improvement, but functional markers such as:

- Grip strength
- Gait speed
- Immune profile
- Hormonal output (e.g., testosterone, DHEA-S)

5.5 Pediatric and Early-Life Predictive Research

If OsteoAge is valid, peak bone mass in adolescence may not only determine fracture risk but also overall life trajectory. Future studies should investigate:

- The link between early skeletal development and midlife resilience
- The long-term impact of childhood under-mineralization

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- Potential for early-life OsteoAge screening as a healthspan predictor

Such work could transform how we understand 'preventive aging'—from treating decline to engineering biological durability from the start.

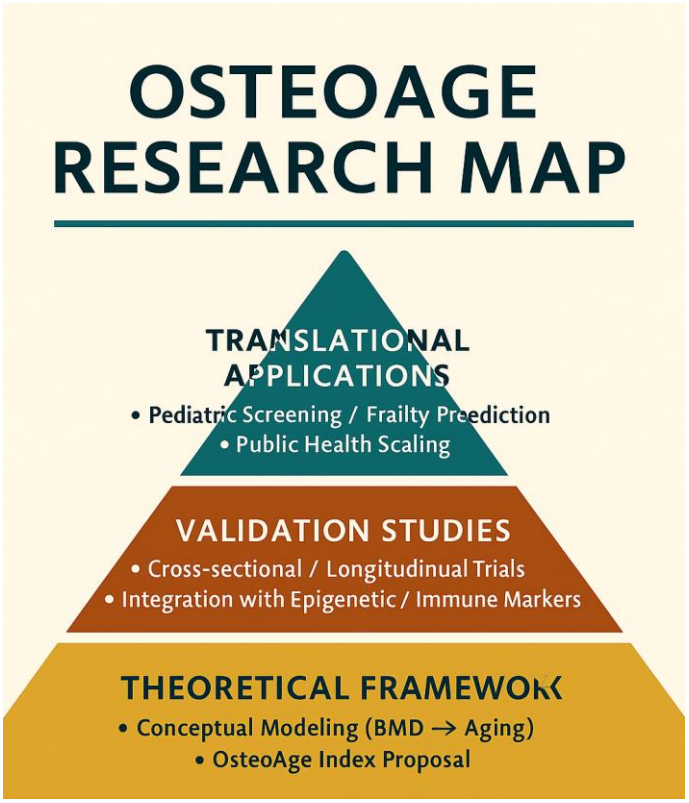

Figure 5.1: The OsteoAge Research Map – a layered roadmap from theoretical modeling to clinical and public health applications of the OsteoAge Index.

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6. Conclusion

OsteoAge Theory proposes a fundamental shift in how we understand the aging process—moving from a biochemistry-first model to a structure-first paradigm. By recognizing bone mass decline not only as a byproduct of aging but also as a primary biological signal, this theory reframes the skeleton as the earliest and most stable indicator of systemic degradation.

This perspective is supported by converging research in skeletal endocrinology, bone marrow transformation, and the interconnectivity of immune aging. The correlation between declining bone mineral density and outcomes such as immune suppression, frailty, and mortality is no longer circumstantial—it is systemic.

The potential development of a clinically valid OsteoAge Index—derived from BMD deviation and marrow data—could provide healthcare systems with a simple, scalable tool for aging prediction and intervention. Unlike molecular clocks, which can be invasive or costly, this model emphasizes accessibility and practicality, especially in low-resource settings.

Moreover, the OsteoAge Theory opens the door to new interventions that prioritize structural restoration through mineral support, mechanical loading, and marrow rejuvenation, thereby placing bone at the center of regenerative medicine.

As a theory, OsteoAge does not aim to replace existing aging models, but to complement and anchor them in the one organ that silently records time: the skeleton.

Future aging research must consider what the bones have been telling us all along—not just how we stand, but how long we might stand well.

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