

‘Women’s’ disease poses threat to men

One in two American women will suffer a fracture caused by osteoporosis, but men need to be worrying, too.

One out of every four men older than 50 will suffer an osteoporosis-related fracture, but unlike women, men aren’t as aware of the disease and don’t take steps to prevent it.

“Most people consider osteoporosis a disease for women,” said Dr. Jeffrey Landsman, senior and regional medical director for the Erickson Medical Group. About 10 million Americans have osteoporosis, but 20 percent of them, some 2 million, are men.

Women experience rapid bone loss after menopause, but men tend to have a gradual loss and develop osteoporosis later in life.

The symptoms are losing height, curvature and hunching forward.

“But if you treat it early, you can prevent that, so that’s why we want to find it early, to really prevent it,” Dr. Landsman said.

Medicare covers routine bone density screening for women, Dr. Landsman said, but it only pays for screening for men if there is another indication of bone loss.

On Erickson campuses, such as Oak Crest Village in Parkville and Charlestown in Catonsville, bone density screening is performed. Dr. Landsman said doctors will do a simple ultrasound of men’s heels to check bone density.

“We’re finding a lot of them are coming back low,” he said, adding that then Medicare will pay for a complete bone density screening.

Researchers at Erickson campuses are also gathering information from a questionnaire survey to gauge men’s knowledge of osteoporosis and how it affects them.

Sometimes osteoporosis is picked up during routine X-rays for other problems; for example, a spinal X-ray might show collapsed vertebrae.

Dr. Landsman said like women, men need to pay attention to their calcium and vitamin D intake because vitamin D is essential for healthy bones.

“We’re finding a lot of vitamin D deficiency,” he said.

The easiest way to get vitamin D is exposure to 10 minutes of sunlight a day - but without sunscreen and protective clothing. However, older bodies have trouble converting the vitamin D, so supplements still might be needed. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, men over 50 need 800 to 1000 IU of vitamin D3 and 1,200 milligrams of calcium.

Regular, weight-bearing exercise, including walking, also preserves bone density.