

Include men in osteoporosis screening guidelines, study says

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62-year-old Gary Hunter was shocked to learn that his broken vertebra was caused by osteoporosis. National Jewish Health rheumatologist Mehrnaz Maleki, M.D., says most of her patients think the disease affects primarily women. Dr. Maleki's colleagues want to change that perception with a push for new screening guidelines that include at-risk men. Credit: National Jewish Health

Most people associate osteoporosis with women. But the truth is, one in four men over the age of 50 will break a bone as a result of this condition. That's more men than will have prostate cancer, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

Now a leading researcher at National Jewish Health is calling for [men](#) to be included in the screening guidelines for osteoporosis. Elizabeth Regan, MD, PhD, a researcher at National Jewish Health, studied more than 3,000 smokers and former smokers ages 45 to 80 and tested their bone density. What she found was surprising.

"We actually found that men were slightly more likely to have [low bone density](#), and that they were slightly more likely to have vertebral fractures," said Dr. Regan. "In fact, 60 percent of the men had [vertebral fractures](#) compared to 40 percent of the women, while 55 percent of men had low bone density compared to 45 percent of women."

Dr. Regan said that this points to the need for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, which last updated osteoporosis screening guidelines in 2011, to consider adding at-risk men to their [screening guidelines](#), which now include only women. "I think that a sizable number of men who have low bone density are not getting diagnosed, and they're not getting treated. And so they're sustaining fractures that

they could avoid. We need to change that," said Dr. Regan.

Dr. Regan says that the screenings could be either the standard [bone density](#) scan or a CT scan, which is sometimes used to screen heavy smokers for cancer. Former rancher Gary Hunter agrees. The 62-year-old suffers from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and snapped a vertebra while picking up an oxygen tank that weighed only a few pounds. He was shocked to learn that his broken back was caused by osteoporosis. "I've been active all my life. I've broken bones before, but never doing a simple task like that. I never dreamed that could happen to me," said Hunter.



Researchers at National Jewish Health are pushing for at-risk men to be included in osteoporosis screening guidelines. Currently the screening guidelines by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force only include women. Credit: National Jewish Health

Mehrnaz Maleki, MD, a rheumatologist at National Jewish Health, says that proper screening is essential, because many times a diagnosis of osteoporosis comes as a surprise. "Normally osteoporosis does not have any signs, which is the problem. You might not have any pain or other signs that something might be wrong," she said.

Dr. Maleki has these tips for [osteoporosis](#) prevention for both men and women:

- Take a calcium supplement.
- Take a vitamin D supplement, or spend 20 minutes outside every day to absorb sunshine, which boosts vitamin D levels.
- Eat a healthy diet rich in calcium.
- Stay active, especially with weight-bearing exercises.
- Don't smoke.
- Don't drink alcohol in excess.

More information: Annals of the American Thoracic Society, Feb. 26, 2015. To learn more about the findings:
www.atsjournals.org/doi/abs/10...2-5910C#.VS8jchPF874

Provided by National Jewish Health

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