

- Bones—diseases

GET YOUR BONES CHECKED, IT COULD JUST SAVE YOUR LIFE!

Mary Kennedy, ambassador of a new osteoporosis awareness campaign says ...

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AT 67, Mary Kennedy is the picture of health. The veteran broadcaster admits to prioritising her health and fitness, being an avid runner and following a mostly healthy diet.



So it's fitting that for the second year in a row, Mary has taken on the role of Irish Osteoporosis Society ambassador. Tomorrow is World Osteoporosis Day, and Mary is keen to

raise awareness about the risk of osteoporosis, particularly to women over 65, who have gone through the menopause.

'It's my second year doing it and I'm delighted to do it and encourage people — especially women — to check out their bone health. I underwent all the blood test and DEXA scans and luckily I have no issues there but the numbers speak for themselves. In 2019, 4,000 people were hospitalised for hip fractures and 69 per cent were women.'

And Mary admits that while she takes a great interest in her health and fitness, taking regular runs and completing strength training,

One in five women die within a year of breaking a hip

this wasn't always the case when it came to looking after her bone health.

'I had never given much thought to my bone health until I learned about the risks, particularly to women my own age, over 65,' she admits. 'There are some simple steps to take to help protect your bones. For example, every day, I make sure that I take the daily recommended amounts of calcium and Vitamin D and I also try to ensure I get my five-a-day when it comes to fruit and vegetables.'

'I do like to stay fit but I also like to live. I enjoy my food, and I love champagne when I can get it, but I balance it,' she says. 'Put simply, I don't like not feeling fit.'

The Irish Osteoporosis Society are urging women over 65 to make bone health a priority.

The latest research shows that one in five women die within 12 months of breaking their hip, and in Ireland, nearly seven out of 10 hip fractures happen to women.

What's even more alarming is the lack of awareness that surrounds osteoporosis, and the condition's link to menopause.

A recent survey of GPs across the country by the organisation has revealed that 92 per cent of patients who are diagnosed with osteoporosis after suffering a fracture are surprised about their diagnosis.

Approximately one in three women over the age of 50 will fracture a bone due to osteoporosis, and a major cause of bone loss is when a woman's oestrogen levels decline due to menopause.

For some women, bone loss happens faster than for others and some will lose 20 per cent of their bone density during the five to seven years after menopause.

Recent research indicates that the treatment gap for the silent disease is widening across the country and Ireland has the sixth highest rate of hip fragility fractures in the world.

Professor Moira O'Brien, founder of the Irish Osteoporosis Society, describes the diagnosis rate as 'shocking, considering most fractures can be prevented and osteoporosis, unlike many diseases, is treatable'.

'Early diagnosis of this silent disease is extremely important to help people, particularly women, avoid potentially life changing injuries,' says O'Brien.

The Irish Osteoporosis Society are focusing on women with more than half (53 per cent) at increased risk of a fragility fracture still untreated for osteoporosis, leaving a large proportion of women at risk of debilitating, but preventable, fractures. Some of these can occur from something as simple as a sneeze or bending over to tie a shoelace.

'Our recent GP survey indicates clearly that more awareness is needed but also GPs need better access to resources like DEXA scans, which in some areas GPs can send public

patients to several private clinics,' says O'Brien.

'We know that recovery from bone fractures can be very difficult, so we are asking people to become aware of their bone health and speak to their GP or contact us at the Irish Osteoporosis Society.'

Risk factors for osteoporosis include those that are out of our control such as: being a woman over 65, having a history of osteoporosis in your family and having a history of broken bones.

Other risk factors that we can control include being a smoker, drinking excessive amount of alcohol and having a low body weight.

Over half (54 per cent) of the GPs surveyed said a lack of resources has a negative effect on getting a diagnosis of osteoporosis, making it increasingly important that each patient has a better understanding of the risk factors in order to manage their bone health and raise any concerns with their own GP. The survey also found that 69 per cent of GPs offer advice to at risk patients on how to avoid fractures while 100 per cent believe that patient knowledge needs to be improved.

'I would encourage all women to speak to their GP about potential risk factors and steps that can be taken to help protect bone health or visit the Irish Osteoporosis Society website,' says Mary. 'It's really so important.'

Visit irishosteoporosis.ie for up-to-date advice on how to protect your bones. The 'She Doesn't Deserve A Break' campaign is associated with the Irish Osteoporosis Society and organised by Amgen

The treatment gap for this disease is widening

Up to 70% of people diagnosed with coeliac disease are women. Speaking during World Menopause Awareness Month, Sarah Keogh, Coeliac Society of Ireland said: 'Untreated this can shorten the life span of a woman's reproductive cycle. It can delay the start of a girl's periods and it can cause early menopause. Women who have untreated coeliac disease and severe gluten intolerance are more likely to have an early menopause.' It's important that if you have any concerns about your gut health that you request a test for coeliac disease from your GP.