

Doctor's warning over signs of the 'silent bone disease'

By Lee Moran

LOOK after your bones before it's too late – this is the message from a leading consultant from Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust.

Dr Taher Mahmud is warning people of all ages to look out for signs which show they could be developing the "silent disease" osteoporosis – which thins your bones so much they can break spontaneously.

The consultant rheumatologist and physician said: "It's such a common disease and affects so many people. But they put up with the pain because they see it as just getting old."

"What I want to say is stop being so fussy and go and get checked out, because there are many ways in which we can treat the problem."

Osteoporosis occurs when the bones start to thin out, leaving them more susceptible to being broken after even the smallest of falls.

Symptoms can include the loss of height and the disease affects more than three million sufferers in the UK.

And it's not just old people who get the disease – youngsters intent on following the latest fad can be affected equally as much.

You are three times more likely to develop the disease than have a heart attack, seven times more likely to get it than have a stroke and you are 10 times more likely to contract the disease than breast cancer than getting breast cancer. In the year following a hip fracture, around a fifth of patients die. For eld-



CONSULTATION: Dr Taher Mahmud

erly people suffering from the disease a hip fracture leads to half never walking again without assistance and almost as many getting long-term insomnia because of the pain.

Dr Mahmud, who has worked at Pembury Hospital since 2006, said: "Bone masses peak when people are in their 30s and then slowly start to thin."

"It depends on the individual person, how much they deteriorate, but it can mean they are unable to walk unaided."

"Lots of people do not know they have the condition, but, if they have a simple test and are diagnosed with it, we have very good ways of treating them."

"It is one of the only cases in medicine where we can apparently reverse the condition."

Dr Mahmud said the condition had a

huge financial impact on the NHS and costs the service millions of pounds every year.

But he said if people took a simple check and were diagnosed then it was very easy to treat.

And those who were given the all-clear could be taught preventative measures to stop it developing in the first place.

He said: "For people worried about osteoporosis, in the first instance, I would ask them to check out the National Osteoporosis Society website."

"They can inform themselves and, if worried, go to their GP, who will advise them on how to proceed. As the population gets older many more people will be getting fractures and in the next 40 years the amount of people suffering in Europe alone is expected to double."

Pembury Hospital is a one-stop shop for osteoporosis sufferers.

Anyone referred by their GP can be scanned to measure the density of their bones, see a consultant and be given treatment – all in the course of a couple of visits.

The treatments vary, but can include daily, weekly or monthly courses of tablets, injections or infusions.

Dr Mahmud added: "There can be massive complications for people who end up in hospital because of fractures caused by osteoporosis, so obviously it would be better to keep them out."

"This is a positive story in medicine as we can actually do something quite considerable for patients suffering from the disease."

How can you prevent it?

- Take regular exercise and walk as much possible
- Have a diet including foods rich in calcium and vitamin D
- Avoid smoking and drinking too much.
- Check out your family history
- Get as much sunlight as you can
- Read more about Osteoporosis online:
- National Osteoporosis Society – www.nos.org.uk
- NHS Direct – www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust – www.mtw.nhs.uk

Who is most at risk?

- Those who have already had a bone fracture after a minor fall or bump
- People with a strong family history of the disease
- Those who have dieted for a long period, have had anorexia or bulimia
- People who have done excessive exercise, such as marathon running
- Smokers and heavy alcohol drinkers
- Steroid users
- Women past the menopause

Staff rewarded for work

STAFF at a frozen food supplier in Headcorn were rewarded for their hard work when they completed NVQs in food manufacturing.

The 10 workers at Ardo UK were the first group to gain the qualification after the company introduced it last year.

Operations director Jim Everest said: "Training and

development of our staff is extremely important to us and, we believe, key to the success of our business which is why all our employees have been given the opportunity to achieve an NVQ."

"It's all entirely voluntary so we're delighted that 60 of the 108 staff here at Headcorn have chosen to take part."



PROUD: Staff at Ardo, in Headcorn, who completed NVQs in food manufacturing

Play croquet at Penshurst

IF YOU fancy a game of croquet, go along to Penshurst Place on Sunday July 20.

Royal Tunbridge Wells Croquet Club is holding a practice afternoon on the South Lawns, where club members will demonstrate how to play.

The session starts at noon and runs until 4.30pm. Normal garden admission prices apply.

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