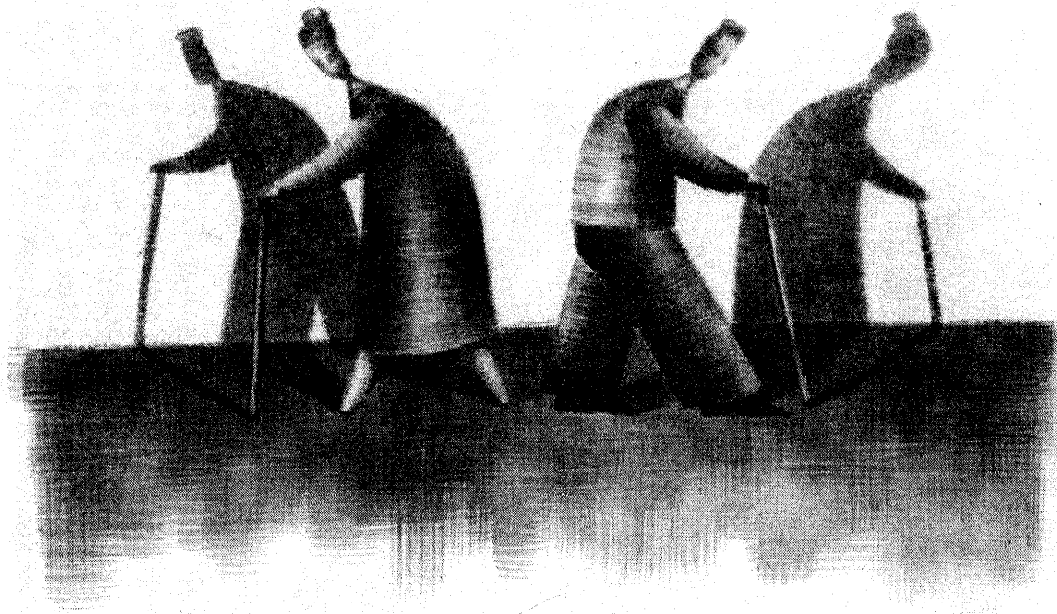


Not for Women Only . . .



DANUTA JARECKA ILLUSTRATION

Breast cancer & other ills affect men, too, so it's critical to heed symptoms

By **TONI KAMINS**

Tom Sanders has a 30%-40% chance of surviving breast cancer for five years.

Tom (not his real name), in his mid-40s, is the same age his father was when he died of the same disease. And Tom has twin sons.

Though it is rare, some 260 men will die from breast cancer in 1996, according to the American Cancer Society — and approximately 1,400 cases of male breast cancer will be diagnosed. But because it is rare, most men are not aware there is any risk and may ignore critical symptoms. This is true of several diseases typically associated with women that can also affect men.

"Anyone with breasts can develop breast cancer, and that includes men," says Dr. Jeanne Petrek, director of the Surgical Program at the Evelyn Lauder Breast Center of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

According to Petrek, breast cancer in men may show up "as a skin eruption on the breast or a weepy sore that doesn't heal."

Dr. Steven Brand, a surgeon, adds that men should seek medical advice if they have any kind of breast lump, especially a painless one, or bloody discharge from the nipple.

Petrek says that, in contrast to women's, a man's breast tumor "doesn't have much room to grow before it is noticed." Even a small tumor (under 2 centimeters), she points out, is the size of a nickel.

And because breast tissue in men is

sparse, "there is no lumpectomy," says Petrek. "Usually, the surrounding muscle must be removed. But reconstructive surgery is not an issue."

Osteoporosis is another disease associated with women to which men are susceptible.

According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, 1.5 million men suffer from osteoporosis and another 3.5 million are at risk for this disease, characterized by low bone mass and structural deterioration of the bone tissue. Because most cases in the U.S. are women, "most men don't realize they are susceptible," says Dr. Robert Lindsay, president of the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

And because bone loss occurs without obvious symptoms, it is frequently diagnosed only when a limb or hip is broken as the result of a sometimes minor bump or fall.

Don't ignore symptoms

Other symptoms include collapsed vertebrae (which may show up initially as severe back pain), loss of height (some height loss is normal with aging), or spinal deformities like stooped posture.

Dr. Ethel Siris, director of the Osteoporosis Program at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital notes that osteoporosis occurs in men older than 65.

Men are only half as likely as women to develop osteoporosis because "they start with greater bone mass," says Siris. She adds that various drugs can contribute to loss of bone density and result in osteoporosis. These include steroids, thyroid drugs, anti-convulsants, certain antacids, methotrexate, cyclosporin A and cholestyramine (used to control blood cholesterol).

According to Siris, most men with osteoporosis have some other contributing factors in their medical history. These include smoking, heavy drinking and a sedentary lifestyle. "Primary osteoporosis, osteoporosis for which there is no other explanation, is rare in men."

As for prevention, Siris cautions

young men not to smoke, to abstain from heavy drinking, exercise regularly — particularly weight-bearing exercise — and get plenty of calcium and Vitamin D.

And sometimes men, like women, carry a good thing too far. As the anti-fat message becomes an integral part of our culture, a growing number of men are misinterpreting that message and suffering eating disorders.

Dr. Timothy Walsh, director of the Eating Disorders Program at the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University notes that there are three primary eating disorders: Anorexia nervosa, starving oneself, is a disease of adolescent girls — it rarely affects men and boys; bulimia nervosa, a cycle of food binges followed by purges (vomiting or the use of laxatives), and binge-eating disorder, fairly new to the lexicon.

"The diagnosis is still being refined," says Walsh, but it is characterized by frequent (two or three times a week) binges during which a person will eat huge amounts of food at one time (without purging).

In men, bulimia usually affects those who are already overweight and begin to diet, whereas it shows up in women of normal weight. Binge-eating disorder also tends to be found in men who are already overweight.

According to Walsh, pervasive anti-fat health messages may contribute to disorders in individuals with other psychological and emotional problems.

This is thought to be a contributing factor in eating disorders in women, who have long been bombarded by society and the media with the message that thinness equals beauty and success. But the message is increasingly aimed at both sexes, says Walsh.

Walsh says it is important for men to be aware that occasional overeating or even pigging out does not imply an eating disorder. Nor, he says, does every overweight person have an eating disorder.

(Kamins is a freelance writer.)

Male Call

For further information:

■ The American Cancer Society, 1-800-ACS-2345.

■ The National Osteoporosis Foundation, (202) 223-2226.

■ The New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University, (212) 960-2200.