

Experts from the Hospital del Mar prove that having osteoarthritis leads to more fractures and falls in post-menopausal women

A study lead by a team of researchers from the Hospital del Mar and its research institute, IMIM, concludes that post-menopausal women with osteoarthritis have a 20% greater risk of experiencing bone fractures due to osteoporosis and are at greater risk of falling –nearly 30% more than post-menopausal women without osteoarthritis. This study was selected at the annual scientific meeting of the American College of Rheumatology and the results were highlighted at a press conference in Chicago.

The researchers who took part in this study, carried out with over 60,000 women, had the objective of discovering whether a link exists between osteoarthritis, falls and osteoporotic fractures in post-menopausal women. This study leads to a change in paradigm: initially it was believed that osteoarthritis protected these women from fractures, since osteoarthritis produces some changes in articulations which are typical to this condition, leading to bones which, in appearance, are more robust but, thanks to the study, it has been seen that this is not the case and that patients present a higher number of fractures. **“Our figures suggest that patients with osteoarthritis have bones which are more robust, but this is not correlated to a reduction in fractures, quite the contrary. Results suggest that women with osteoarthritis are at a greater risk of falling and suffering osteoporotic fractures and, it seems, that the increase in falls is actually the main cause of the number of fractures they experience”**, explains Dr. Adolf Díez, the coordinator of the GLOW study at a world level, together with Dr. Robert Lindsay from Columbia University **“since the risk of fractures, in these women, is 12% if they experience osteoarthritis and drops to 9% if they do not”**. According to the results of the study **“osteoarthritis, pain in articulations and a bad functioning of these may probably be the greatest risk of falling and, therefore, of having an osteoporotic fracture”**, says Daniel Prieto-Alhambra, the main researches for this study. **“Both osteoarthritis and fractures are very frequent among elderly people, and finding a link between them is very important. Patients with osteoarthritis should be checked adequately to prevent the risk of fractures, even if bones seem to be larger and, according to some, stronger”** adds Dr. Díez.



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The team of Drs. Prieto-Alhambra and Díez has studied 60,393 women aged 55 or more (2,910 of which in Barcelona) who took part in the GLOW study (Global Longitudinal Study of Osteoporosis in Women), and international study which is conducted annually, during three years, on a healthy population of women from several countries including the USA, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Spain and many more that has contributed to a greater knowledge on osteoporosis. From the total women participating in the GLOW study, nearly a third of them (32%) had been diagnosed with osteoporosis and, from these, 40% has osteoarthritis; 27% has experienced fractures in the past, 15% had a low weight, 38% had fallen recently and 18% had a family history of hip fractures.

Osteoarthritis is the most common articulation disease affecting middle-aged and elderly people. It is estimated that in Spain there are some 5 million people affected by this condition, which is characterized by progressive deterioration of the cartilage in articulations which, at the same time, leads to structural changes, an excessive bone growth and a loss of tone and weakening of the muscles and tendons; all of this may limit mobility and cause swelling, pain and disability.