

IMPLEMENTING *STRONGWOMEN* TO PREVENT AND MANAGE OSTEOPOROSIS

Lifestyle program strengthens bones; reaches rural areas of Pennsylvania

Public Health Problem

- Osteoporosis causes bones to become porous and increases the likelihood of a costly and disabling fracture. People who have osteoporosis may not know it until their bones become so brittle that a fall causes a bone to break.
- Getting weight-bearing physical activity and an adequate amount of the nutrients necessary for bone health, such as calcium, are positive factors that help women prevent and manage osteoporosis.
- Over half the Pennsylvania women with osteoporosis are not physically active enough to benefit their bones and few are eating the recommended amounts of calcium- rich foods.

Program

- Penn State Cooperative Extension and the Pennsylvania Department of Health have collaborated for several years to implement the *StrongWomen* Program which applies the research on the benefits of strength training for older women to a community-based program using a supportive approach to help middle-aged and older women make lifestyle changes in exercise and eating habits.
- The program promotes bone-strengthening activities and incorporates education on the importance of eating bone-building foods. It seeks to get each participant to adopt at least one health promoting eating habit and one regular activity to increase physical strength and bone health.
- In one county example, the Wyoming County Community Alliance and Wyoming County Cooperative Extension Office bring the *StrongWomen* program to four rural sites located near senior citizen housing and hold them in cooperation with the Area Agency on Aging and the Housing Authority. These agencies provide in-kind support and disseminate information on the program to health professionals.

Impact

- Sixty percent of participating women increased their fitness ability as measured by a fitness test, a benefit to their bones and cost-effective for prevention of other chronic diseases as noted in a recent study of community-based physical activity programs.
- A majority of women completing the program report improved eating habits and increased selection of healthy, bone-building foods and many also reported better health and feeling physically stronger.
- Hard-to-reach rural women now have better access to a research-based program to improve bone health. Leveraging of local funding and training of community volunteers added resources to implement *StrongWomen* in additional outlying areas.

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