

A Woman's Loving heart

By Dr. Rob Danoff

Most people think heart disease and heart attacks are a man's problem. But when it comes to affairs of the heart, everyone is affected. In fact, one in four men, as well as one in four women, has some form of cardiovascular disease (CVD). If you thought a woman's broken heart was a figure of speech, you were wrong. Unfortunately, coronary heart disease takes the lives of over 500,000 women each year, and is the number one killer of women over the age of twenty-five. Yet in spite of these facts, most women don't consider heart disease to BE THEIR personal greatest health risk.



WHY THE DISCONNECT?

A recent poll of women revealed only twenty percent believed their biggest health threat was from heart disease. Instead, many thought cancer, especially breast cancer, was their number one health worry. They may not realize that approximately one in 2.5 women die from the effects of heart disease or stroke, compared to one in thirty from breast cancer. Unfortunately, many women don't get the connection that their hearts need to be sheltered from the unchecked effects of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes and inactivity in addition taking precautions if they have a family history of early heart disease. Many believe this is a health danger that can happen to other people, not to them.

Perhaps another reason for this lack of healthy heart urgency on the part of many women is the medical community. In the past, many medical studies were done on males, and the model for diagnosing and treating heart disease was based upon this information. Thankfully, this model has changed and we have newer and up to date information regarding heart disease in women. But even so, when it comes down to diagnosing and treating it, there is a gender gap. Sadly, women with heart attacks are more likely to die than men, and that's not just older women. Women of all ages are more likely to die. It has been estimated that the cardiac death risk for women is 1.7 times that of men. But, I do have some good news; women and their health-

care providers are teaming up to be more proactive in the prevention, recognition and treatment of heart disease in women. With this approach, a woman's heart will be better protected.

WHERE TO BEGIN

The best defense against an enemy is knowledge of their tactics. For a women knowing her risk factors, taking action to control what can be changed, and following her heart, in a healthy way can defeat this enemy.

RISK FACTORS SHE CANNOT CONTROL

FAMILY HISTORY
AGE (55 and over)

RISK FACTORS SHE CAN CONTROL

- SMOKING
- HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
- PHYSICAL INACTIVITY
- DIABETES
- ELEVATED BLOOD CHOLESTEROL LEVELS
- OVERWEIGHT
- METABOLIC SYNDROME
- WAIST MEASUREMENT OF 35 INCHES OR MORE
- HORMONE THERAPY
- OVERWHELMING STRESS
- EXCESS ALCOHOL

After reviewing your cardiac risks, your physician will encourage lifestyle modifications (exercise, dietary changes, etc.) in an effort to reverse the risk factors you can control. Next, medical information including blood tests, EKG, an exercise stress test or even a CT Scan using next generation Electron Beam Technology (EBT) to look into your heart and its blood supply may be requested. Depending upon the results of these tests, a heart-healthy plan tailored just for you will be put into place.



LISTEN TO YOUR HEART

Most of us think a heart attack means a sudden "crushing chest pain" which goes into the neck, jaw, left shoulder and arm. This isn't always the case, especially in women. In fact, about a third of women have no chest pain at all.

However, what they may experience is an unusual and unexplained fatigue, in addition to one or more of the following symptoms that may appear in a gradual, rather than a sudden, manner:

- PRESSURE, FULLNESS, DISCOMFORT OR SQUEEZING IN THE CENTER OF HER CHEST
- SHORTNESS OF BREATH OR DIFFICULTY BREATHING
- POUNDING OR A FEELING OF EXTRA HEARTBEATS
- UPPER ABDOMINAL PAIN
- NAUSEA, VOMITING OR SEVERE INDIGESTION
- SWEATING FOR NO APPARENT REASON
- DIZZINESS WITH WEAKNESS
- PANIC WITH FEELING OF IMPENDING DOOM

Please know the above symptoms can be caused by many other conditions. However, it is best to play it safe and consult your nearest healthcare professional or emergency room.

EVERY BEAT COUNTS

In the event that an emergency heart symptom is occurring, here is a checklist of things to do:

1. If you suspect you or a loved one are having a heart attack, call 9-1-1 right away. They will take you to the nearest emergency room with 24-hour cardiac care capability
2. As long as you are not allergic or have any other reason why you cannot take aspirin, chew an uncoated aspirin right away, as this can reduce damage to the heart muscle.
3. Even if you are not sure you are experiencing a heart attack, it is best to go to your local emergency room to find out.

It is important to know that every minute counts and time is heart muscle. The quicker you get diagnosed and treated, the greater the chance your heart muscle has to survive, and to be filled with love once more.

*Reprinted with permission of MSN Health & Fitness
<http://health.msn.com>*



Robert Danoff, D.O., M.S., is a family physician and the director of the Family Practice Residency Program at Frankford Hospital, Jefferson Health System, Philadelphia, Pa. Dr. Rob graduated from the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine and did his Family Practice residency at Frankford Hospital. Dr. Rob is the medical correspondent for CN8, The Comcast Network, a regular contributor to Discovery Health Online and MSN Health and Fitness. He is also a contributing writer for the New York Times Special Features and writes a weekly medical column for the Bucks Courier Times, Bucks County Pa.