

Why Heart Disease is a Real Concern for Women

There is a common misconception that heart disease is a man's disease. In fact, for women, it is the primary cause of death among women. According to the American Heart Association, in 2005 over 450,000 women died from a cardiovascular related disease whereas cancer, in different forms, killed less than 270,000 women. As a result, the American Heart Association and physicians across the country have made a concerted effort to educate women about heart disease and their specific risk factors. This is because, while there are common risks for men and women, there are some that are unique to the female.

- **Smoking**- this is a dangerous habit anyway, but it also causes a greater risk for heart disease in women. For some reason, the effects of smoking have a more profound affect on a woman's cardiovascular system than a man's.
- **Menopause**- During the transition to menopause, the levels of estrogen in the body fall. As these levels decline, the levels of bad cholesterol, or LDL, tend to rise, which cause the formation of plaque in the vessels. Another side effect of menopause is the shrinking of blood vessel walls, which makes it easier for them to clog with plaque or clots. Finally, the clotting agent fibrinogen increases in the blood, which raises the risk of clot formations.
- **Abdominal fat**- everyone has heard that stress causes fat to accumulate around the waistline and women tend to carry more stress on their bodies. Having a thick waist plus high blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar are like a heart disease ticking time-bomb for women.
- **Mental health**- Women's mental health tends to have a greater effect on the health of their heart. Because they are twice as likely to become depressed than men, their risk for heart disease is increased. Depression and stress tend to reduce activity levels and personal health is often neglected, which can be detrimental to heart health.

Common risk factors for men and women:

- **Obesity**- this condition often means that blood pressure and cholesterol are also high. Diabetes may also be a factor. But, carrying around extreme weight is also puts a strain on the heart. All of these conditions lead to calcium build-up in the arteries and increased heart mass.
- **Diabetes**- Typically Type 2 diabetes carries the greatest risk. The risk for heart disease is double or more for women with diabetes. According to the American Heart Association, more than half of the people with diabetes that die do so from cardiovascular disease.
- **Genetics**- some people are simply pre-disposed to have heart problems.
- **High cholesterol and blood pressure**- these two can be high without excess weight and that can make it even sneakier.

- **Sedentary lifestyle-** not being active or exercising means the heart is not getting a workout either. Cardiovascular exercises help strengthen the muscle and improve blood flow.

Because the symptoms of heart disease are different and can be subtle in a woman, it is important to consult with a physician if these symptoms persist: pain in the neck, shoulders, stomach and upper back, excessive fatigue, dizziness, nausea, difficulty breathing and excessive sweating. The obvious chest-crushing pain may not come until it is too late so a woman needs to know her body.

Excessive fatigue, dizziness, nausea, difficulty breathing and excessive sweating. The obvious chest-crushing pain may not come until it is too late so a woman needs to know her body. Dr. Yessenow works closely with a number of cardiologists and will refer you accordingly for your condition.