

Women and Heart Disease

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Women's Risk for Heart Disease

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women
 - #1 for African American and Caucasian women
 - Equal to cancer among Hispanic women
 - #2 behind cancer among American Indian, Alaska native, and Asian / Pacific Islander women
- In 2013 heart disease accounted for nearly 290,000 deaths among women
- Heart attacks in particular claimed 50,000 women's lives in 2014

Physicians do not target women

- The American Heart Association and CDC report that 45-54% of women know heart disease is the leading cause of death among women
- YET just 39% of physicians rank it as a top priority, after weight and breast cancer

Why are women at greater risk for heart disease?

- Plaque formation differs among women; the plaque may not protrude into arteries; this makes it harder to detect in testing
- Stents are less effective among women
- More research is required on alternative treatments such as sucking out clots that form or using clot-busting drugs
- Even after an MI women without significant obstruction may not get the medical care and treatment they need
- Hypertension and diabetes are greater risks for women
- Menopause and pregnancy present risks related to hormonal changes and cardiac demand



Symptoms of a myocardial infarction (heart attack) may differ between women and men

- Women are less likely to feel crushing chest pain; rather, pain in the back, arms, neck, or jaw
- Nausea or indigestion
- Sense of dread
- Weakness
- Difficulty breathing
- Profuse cold sweating

Speed of Treatment

- Women delay getting treated an average of 54 hours compared to men's 16 hours, per the AHA
- Even if they seek emergency assistance, they tend to wait 37 minutes longer than men on the average
- When women do seek emergency assistance, it takes them an average of 30 minutes longer to get to a hospital

Outcomes of Treatment

- Women who survive are more likely to have complications in the hospital such as shock, bleeding, or heart failure
- Women are likelier to die within 1 year after heart attack
 - They tend to be older
 - They are more likely to have comorbid conditions
- MDs are less likely to follow practice guidelines with women
- Women are less likely than men to adhere to the medication regime or participate in cardiac rehab

Risk Factors for Women

- 90% of US women have at least one risk factor for heart disease
 - Elevated blood pressure
 - Diabetes
 - Elevated cholesterol
 - Excess weight
 - Smoking (1 in 7 women)
 - Inactivity
 - Poor diet
 - Excess alcohol consumption
 - History of preterm delivery, preeclampsia, gestational diabetes
 - Depression



What can health care providers do about this?

- Be aware!
- Increasingly we hear about the potential for data analytics of electronic health records to identify people at risk early
- Remember the basics:
 - Understand the prevalence of heart disease in women
 - Get accurate and complete personal and family health history from women

What can women do about this?

- Know your blood pressure
- Quit smoking
- Ask health care provider about testing for diabetes and elevated serum lipids
- Eat a Mediterranean diet (emphasizing whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, fish, healthy fats)
- Try to reduce excess weight
- Engage in 150 minutes / week of physical activity
- Limit alcohol to 1 serving / day
- Reduce stress / incorporate healthy coping strategies
- BE AWARE!

WISEWOMAN

- Program of the CDC targeting low income, uninsured, and underinsured women 40-64
- **Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across this Nation**

Resources

- American College of Cardiology
- American Heart Association
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- USDHHS Office on Women's Health
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



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Additional Resources

Mehta, et al. (2016). Acute myocardial infarction in women: A scientific statement from the American Heart Association. Circulation, 133:916-947.