

Women & Heart Disease

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” Proverbs 4:23 NLT

There is a misconception that cancer is the greatest health risk for women, especially breast cancer. In reality, heart disease kills more women than all forms of cancer put together. Minority women have the highest death rate from heart disease while the entire gender has a higher death rate from stroke than men. Part of the problem is that heart disease is displayed differently in women than in men so it becomes difficult to recognize in women if the observer doesn't know the difference in symptoms.

The classic symptoms for heart attack are severe chest pain, a squeezing sensation in the chest lasting 5-10 minutes, pain radiating down the left arm or profuse sweating. Up to 50% of women who suffer heart attacks have symptoms that are considered atypical. These include shortness of breath, indigestion, pain in the jaw, shoulder, or back, sudden nausea or vomiting, unexplained fatigue, fainting, or even dizziness. Anytime a female experiences these symptoms, she should seek medical attention by calling 911. Even a slight hesitation could lead to severe consequences if she is having a cardiac episode.

Plaque buildup can be different in women also. In men it tends to be clumpy and irregular which responds well to angioplasty and stents that flatten out the plaque. In some women, plaque forms an even layer on the vessel lining which means drug therapy works better than angioplasty. Women also respond to aspirin differently. In women, it seems more effective in preventing stroke while in men it is more effective for heart attack prevention.

For a woman, the most important thing to do is talk to her physician. She should discuss her health history and determine potential risks for heart disease. The next step would be to create a plan to change or impact those risks and follow the doctor's instructions. Women are the same but different. It is important to find out individual needs and then address them.

(Source: www.mayoclinic.com)

References / Resources:

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/heartdiseaseinwomen.html - National Institutes of Health

www.womenshealth.gov/fag/heart-disease.cfm - US Department of Health and Human Services

www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4786 – heart and stroke information from American Heart Association

www.4woman.gov/minority/africanamerican/hd.cfm - heart disease for minority women
– US Dept of Health and Human Services

