

HEART DISEASE – THE SURPRISING NUMBER ONE “LADY KILLER”

Tips from Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale on Reducing Cardiovascular Disease Risks in Women

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What's the number one disease that kills women? Chances are, breast cancer comes to mind first. You might be surprised to learn, however, that nearly twice as many women die from cardiovascular diseases than from all forms of cancer combined. In fact, heart attacks kill nearly six times as many women as breast cancer.

There's a dangerous myth that cardiovascular disease affects mostly men. The reality is that cardiovascular disease claims the lives of more than half a million women a year, yet only eight percent of women are aware that it is a major health risk, according to the American Heart Association.

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The Silent Killer

Heart disease is often referred to as a “silent killer” because it can have few early warning signs. In addition to chest pain, women should be aware of these symptoms of a heart attack: pain radiating into the jaw, pain in one or both arms, discomfort similar to indigestion, sudden sweating, nausea, lightheadedness, or abdominal, upper back or neck pain.

Ten tips for reducing your risk of cardiovascular disease

- Get exercise. Remember, your heart is a muscle and needs regular exercise for a minimum of 30

- minutes a day to stay in shape.
- Quit smoking and stay away from second hand smoke.
- Control your blood cholesterol by cutting back on foods high in saturated fat.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Drinking too much alcohol can raise the levels of some fats in the blood and can cause high blood pressure and weight gain.
- Diabetes raises a woman's risk for cardiovascular diseases. Keep track of your blood sugar levels.
- Monitor your blood pressure. A revised national classification system says blood pressure should be below 120/80, which is lower than the previous benchmark.

- Lose those extra pounds if you are overweight, and maintain a healthy weight.
- If you're taking birth control pills, talk with your physician to see if it poses a risk for cardiovascular disease. It can pose risks for some women, particularly women with high blood pressure and women who smoke.
- The way you respond to stress can increase your risk of a heart attack.
- Know your family history of heart disease and inform your physician of these possible risk factors.

Tell your doctor right away if you notice any new or unusual symptoms. Time is of the essence.

Robert R. Orford, M.D., C.M., is Director of the Mayo Clinic Executive Health Program in Scottsdale, Ariz. For more information about this topic, go to www.mayoclinic.com. Mayo Clinic Executive Health Programs are located in Scottsdale; Rochester, Minn.; and Jacksonville, Fla.

To schedule an appointment, call 480-301-8088.