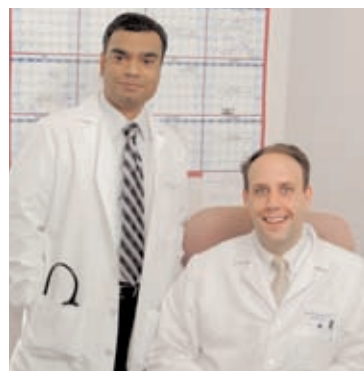




Women's Heart Health . . . Not Just A Man's Disease



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Gone are the times when heart disease was considered "man's disease". According to the latest statistics, women make up about 50% of all heart related deaths in the United States.

Heart disease is the number one killer in women. It claims the lives of more women than all the cancers combined. Unfortunately, compared to men, in women it has poorer prognosis, greater disability, higher rate of undesirable outcomes and earlier death after a heart attack.

Part of the poor prognosis can be contributed to the fact that women either ignore their symp-

toms, self medicate or delay seeking medical attention. Therefore, at presentation, women have more severe damage to their heart leading to the poorer outcome with the treatment. Some other reasons women do not seem to seek medical assistance promptly are non-stereotypical presentation of chest pain, attribution of the chest pain to other conditions such as excess body weight, "not being in shape" and being influenced by a family member or friend who suggest that the symptoms are not consistent with a myocardial infarction.

Recognize The Symptoms

The symptoms of a heart attack are often not recognized in women because of the 'atypical' presentation. The definition of 'typical' angina (heart related chest pain) was developed based on presentation in male patients. The traditional presentation of angina is pressure, burning or squeezing in center of the chest, discomfort in one or both arms, shoulders, neck, jaw, stomach or back, shortness of breath, fatigue, nausea or weakness. In addition to this, women may also experience pain in upper back, throat, jaw or neck, difficulty breathing, flu like symptoms of nausea or vomiting or cold sweats, or feeling of anxiety, loss of appetite and generalized discomfort. If a female experiences any of the symptoms men-

tioned above immediate medical attention should be sought.

It has been shown that women tend to have more generalized narrowing of their coronary arteries compared to men. Even though the extent of narrowing is lesser in women when compared to men at all stages, the severity of their symptoms is higher. Women present with complaints of chest pain more often than men but are often misdiagnosed because of their atypical development or disproportion between the physiologic changes in heart and the severity of presentation.

Know The Risk Factors

It is important to know that risk factors for developing heart disease in women are essentially the same as men, but they seem to affect women more adversely than in men. After the fifth decade of life, women tend to have higher blood cholesterol than their male equivalents, which is worsened by menopause, which seems to decrease HDL (good cholesterol) in post menopause. Diabetic women are at 3% greater risk of developing heart disease than non-diabetic women and are also at greater risk compared to diabetic males. Obesity is another big factor in development of heart disease. Although it is not clear, it is suggested that disrupted ovulation either due to lack of estrogen like in menopause or polycystic

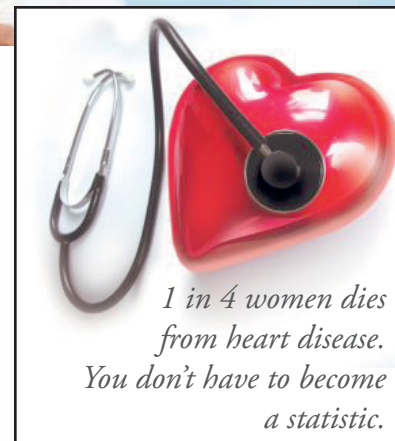


ovarian syndrome or irregular menses may contribute to worsening of these risk factors in women compared to their male counterparts. This is thought to be one of the biggest factors that lead to equal prevalence of heart disease in men and women after age 60.

With that said, there is still a lot we do not know about women's heart disease. We know that the narrowed arteries affect men and women the same way, but what we don't know is that why doesn't the treatment always work the same.

Listen To Your Body

There is a lot that needs to be studied so that we can prevent heart disease in women and when it does happen we can treat a woman's heart more effectively. Both men and women need to be educated regarding the prevalence of heart disease in women so that they can help save lives of their loved ones by recognizing the symptoms.



Talk to your doctor about heart disease

Surprisingly, many women report they've never talked with their doctor about their heart risk and how to keep their heart healthy.

Call Garden State Heart Care at 732-851-4700 to start your heart conversation today!

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