

## Women and Heart Disease.

In a survey in 2003 of 1000 women only 13 % believed that heart disease and stroke are the greatest health care threat to them. Minority women face the highest risk of death from heart disease and yet they have the lowest risk awareness.

Younger women are not immune to heart problems- these just occur more frequently as they get older. Common risk factors include untreated elevated LDL (Bad cholesterol), diabetes, High blood pressure, cigarette smoking or family history of heart disease.

Women often don't recognize the cardiac cause of chest discomfort as it happens and stay at home when ill thinking it will go away or sometimes are too embarrassed to ask for help. Women try to rationalize thinking their problem may be indigestion or a pulled muscle thus minimizing their complaints.

The woman who call the EMT stating she thinks she is having a heart attack will get a quicker response than someone who says they ate bad food and maybe were having food poisoning!

Modifiable risk factors for heart disease include:

Smoking tobacco

Diabetes

Low HDL (Good cholesterol)

High blood pressure

Physical inactivity

Obesity/ overweight.

Warning signs include the classic chest pressure, squeezing or fullness. Pain in other parts of upper body like pain in one or both arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach. Some women may experience shortness of breath, nausea or light-headedness.

Women in their 40s or 50s have a reduction in estrogen levels have an association with changing metabolism. This results in weight increase in the abdominal area, worsening cholesterol profile with decreasing HDL, and increasing LDL, increasing blood pressure and sapping of energy. This is the time to make sure you have a comprehensive medical evaluation by your doctor to address the changes and identify other health problems that may have surfaced. Ask your doctor if you have experienced any kind of chest discomfort or SOB. Report any meds you take even if it is non prescription drugs. Go back to your family to find out if

anyone has had heart attacks or other heart conditions especially in their 40s or 50s as this may signal a genetic tendency toward heart disease which you could be at risk for and should be screened against. Also ask if blood thinners like aspirin are right for you as these drugs are shown to prevent heart attacks from happening in the first place. Always check with your doctor before starting any exercise regime especially if you have not been physically active in the past.

Most women are very good about going to their gynecologist but not to an Internist for their general health. This should be a good wake up call for all women to ensure they are in control of their bodies and look towards a healthier heart in the years to come.