

Heart Disease:

A critical and unrecognized threat to women's health needs your attention. While breast cancer awareness has improved early detection and effective treatment for the disease, an even more significant threat to women's health, heart disease, also demands public attention. Especially since, in many cases, the **devastating consequences of heart disease are preventable.**



CONSIDER THESE STATISTICS from the American Heart Association:

- Cardiovascular disease ranks first among all disease categories in hospital discharges for women.
- Nearly 37 percent of all female deaths in America occur from heart disease, which includes coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke and other cardiovascular diseases.
- Cardiovascular disease is a particularly important problem among minority women. The death rate due to heart disease is substantially higher in black women than in white women.
- In 2005, heart disease claimed the lives of 454,613 females; cancer (all forms combined) 268,890.
- At age 40 and older, 23 percent of women compared with 18 percent of men will die within one year after a heart attack.
- Misperceptions still exist that heart disease is not a real problem for women.

"Heart disease is at least six times more likely to kill a woman than breast cancer and we need to do more to prevent heart disease, similar to the excellent local and national efforts to raise awareness of breast cancer," says James Orford, MD, attending cardiologist at the Heart Institute at Intermountain Medical Center in Murray, one of the leading heart centers in the country.

"Since February is National American Heart Month, it's a good time for women to check their heart health and make a new resolution to keep their heart healthy," says Dr. Orford, who is also on the medical staff of the Intermountain Utah Heart Clinic at Intermountain Medical Center.

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Dr. Orford says four lifestyle changes could improve the odds for most women: quit smoking, increase the frequency and intensity of physical activity, eat a heart healthy diet, and reduce caloric intake to reduce weight.

DR. ORFORD OFFERS THIS ADVICE TO WOMEN:

1. DON'T SMOKE. If you do, quit. If you smoke, quit. A smoker's risk of heart

attack is more than twice that of non-smokers. Smoking narrows your blood vessels, which makes it harder to breathe. Smoking also increases your blood pressure and heart rate, which contributes to cardiovascular disease. Smoking also increases your risk of an early death. Stopping smoking improves your overall health and quality of life.

2. EXERCISE REGULARLY

Fewer people are getting enough exercise. It's estimated that up to 250,000 deaths per year in the United States - about 12 percent of all deaths - are due to a lack of regular physical activity. Only 22 percent of American adults obtain enough

exercise to achieve cardiovascular fitness. "And lack of physical activity is now clearly shown to be a risk factor for heart disease," says Dr. Orford.

Even low-to-moderate intensity activities, when done for as little as 30 minutes a day, can bring benefits. These activities

include pleasure walking, climbing stairs, gardening, yard work, moderate-to-heavy housework, dancing and home exercise.

More vigorous aerobic activities, such as brisk walking, running, swimming and bicycling - done three or four times a week for 30-60 minutes - are best for improving the fitness of the heart and lungs. Overexertion can be harmful, though, says Dr. Orford. "The key is moderation. You should slowly

3. WATCH WHAT YOU EAT

Avoid foods high in fat and cholesterol, which can clog arteries and lead to heart problems. The average American consumes excess calories, which contribute to obesity, sedentary lifestyles and cardiovascular disease.

“Eating more fruits and vegetables reduces your risk of heart attack, stroke and has been found to lower your blood pressure. Reducing salt can lower your blood pressure,” says Dr. Orford.

If you are overweight, weight reduction will improve your quality of life, decrease your risk of cardiovascular disease, decrease your blood pressure and lessen the demand placed on your heart. Avoid fad diets, though, which can be more harmful than helpful. “The best way to lose weight is to work with your doctor to develop an individualized, healthy plan,” says Dr. Orford.

“Furthermore, we can also dramatically reduce risk with well validated medical treatment regimens, including aspirin and medications to reduce blood pressure, lipids and blood glucose. There is also an important role for supervised exercise regimens, and treatment of co-morbidities such as diabetes, lung disease, and even depression,” he says.

Importantly, there are issues that make it difficult for doctors to diagnose heart disease in women. “The first problem is that many patients and doctors mistakenly believe that heart disease is more of a male health concern. The second problem is that men and women describe chest pain differently, creating confusion for some doctors and delaying diagnosis and treatment,” says Dr. Orford.

Men describe the primary symptom associated with abnormal blood supply to the heart as ‘chest pain,’ whereas women may more commonly describe ‘a shortness of breath,’

fatigue, or other non-specific symptoms. Doctors may assume that these symptoms point to an alternative diagnosis, such as asthma or other non-cardiac diagnoses. The third problem is that the medical community is focused on treatments, not prevention. Hopefully, one of the positive consequences of the current healthcare debate will be a greater focus on accessible and affordable preventative care,” he says.

With 37 percent of female deaths in the United States due to heart disease, and with over eight million women in America living with heart disease, women are encouraged to get regular physicals, report worrisome symptoms promptly, and implement the aforemen-

tioned lifestyle changes to reduce risk of coronary heart disease events.

The Heart Institute at Intermountain Medical Center provides the full spectrum of comprehensive cardiac care, including: prevention and detection of silent heart disease, advanced cardiac imaging, complex arrhythmia services, high-risk catheter coronary interventions, heart failure management and education, complex cardiovascular surgery, heart transplantation, mechanical circulatory support and artificial heart technology minimally-invasive heart surgery.

For more information about women and heart disease, contact the Intermountain Utah Heart Clinic at 801.507.3500.



Thirty-seven percent of female deaths in the United States are caused by heart disease.