

Women & Heart Disease
Stephen Treat, MD, FACC
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There are many myths surrounding women and heart disease. The most dangerous is that women do not get heart disease; it is a disease for men. Women are more at risk for breast cancer, right? If this is your opinion you are in the majority of people in the United States, but you couldn't be more wrong. It is this kind of thinking that could cost you or a loved one their life.

Cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of women and it kills more women than the next seven leading causes of death combined. Whether or not you will develop heart disease depends on two things: your genetics and your lifestyle. At this point in time you can not change your genetics, but you can do many things to change your lifestyle and often prevent heart disease. Getting the facts straight is the first step.

There are several known risk factors for heart disease. The more risks you have the more likely you are to develop problems. The risk factors that you can't change include your family history and your age. If you have a close male relative (father or brother) who had heart disease before age 55 or a close female relative (mother or sister) who had heart disease before age 65 than you are more likely to get heart disease yourself. After age 55 you are more likely to develop heart disease.

There are some risk factors that you can often control. These include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking and diabetes. Watching your diet, getting plenty of exercise, and trying to reduce stress are all ways to help with these risk factors. If lifestyle changes are not enough there are medications available to help. Smoking is a very important risk factor, do yourself a favor and quit, better yet, don't even start.

How do you know if you have heart disease? Sometimes there are symptoms such as chest pain or shortness of breath. Women often have symptoms that are considered to be atypical or nonspecific such as flu like symptoms, abdominal pain, unexplained weakness or fatigue, or feelings of anxiety. If you have diabetes or 2 or more risk factors you may need further testing, especially if you have symptoms.

What kind of testing is available and which is best? That is variable and depends on the individual. Options include exercise testing, blood tests, echocardiography, nuclear tests, calcium scores and angiograms. Test results can help determine your risk and help define the treatment that is right for you.

Heart disease unfortunately is common and dangerous and ignoring the problem may lead to complications. If you or a loved one have diabetes or 2 or more of the risk factors that are listed above you should see your doctor to ask about your risk. You can also get a free pre-screening questionnaire by calling the Heart Center of the Rockies at (970) 297-

6990. This will generate a four page report that will be mailed to you. Moderate or high risk women will be phoned by a heart center nurse.

Please take this opportunity to know your risk. It could save your life.

* Dr Treat is a cardiologist with the Heart Center of the Rockies and is board certified in Cardiology, Echocardiography, and Nuclear Cardiology and has an interest in prevention.