



Deadly epidemic: heart attack & stroke in women

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Traditionally, heart disease has only been studied in males. However, this past decade there is a realization that heart disease is different in women, therefore, more studies are now being done.

Does it surprise you that heart attack, stroke and other blood vessel-related diseases are the leading cause of death in American women? To me, it is shocking to know that:

- Heart disease and stroke kill more than half a million American women annually – more than the next 14 causes of death combined.
- Almost one in every two deaths of women is from heart disease, stroke or other cardiovascular disease.

Major risk factors for heart disease and stroke are similar in men and women, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, diabetes, sedentary lifestyle, increasing age, family history and obesity. Oftentimes, a heart attack is the first noticeable sign of heart disease.

The first manifestation of an impending heart attack is chest pain, although women are more likely than men to have upper belly pain, difficulty breathing, nausea and fatigue initially. Detection is also a bit trickier in women than in men. A stress test is less sensitive in women and may be influenced by hormones. Other tests may be more accurate in women such as an ultrasound of the heart while exercising. Ultimately, a heart catheterization can be done, but is more invasive.

As for stroke, the most important risk factor is high blood pressure. High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer” behind stroke and heart attack. Look at this:

- One in four American adults has high blood pressure and only one-third of them know it.
- About 60 percent of women ages 65 to 74 have high blood pressure.
- High blood pressure can develop during pregnancy, most likely in the last three months. Both mother and baby are in danger if untreated.

It is imperative that women who are 20 pounds or more over a healthy weight, have a family history of high blood pressure, smoke or take certain types of birth control pills, know that they are flirting with disaster.

Knowledge coupled with action is power. Heart disease and stroke are not diseases exclusive to men. Therefore, prevention is a must! Stop smoking, exercise and eat healthy. It's helped me. Check out a delicious cholesterol lowering oat bran muffin on my website www.spikelight.com.