

Attention All Women! Listen to Your Heart

BY JANE GRANT TOUGAS

Bonnie Frederick hopes exercise and healthy eating habits will help prevent heart disease.



You may be surprised to learn that heart disease—not breast cancer—is the leading cause of death in women.



Women know a lot about heart disease—in their fathers, husbands and brothers—but not necessarily in themselves. And research shows that even when women say they understand their risk of heart disease, they still believe, “It can’t happen to me.”

The ugly truth is, however, that 8 million American women do have heart

disease and 6 million have a history of heart attack or chest pain. So, yes, it *can* happen to you. If you still need convincing, take a look at these 10 facts women need to know about heart disease:

- Heart disease is the number one killer of both men and women.
- More than 250,000 women die every year from heart attack.

Women at Risk

You can be at risk for heart disease if you:

- 👤 smoke;
- 👤 are overweight;
- 👤 have diabetes;
- 👤 have high LDL (bad) cholesterol;
- 👤 have low HDL (good) cholesterol;
- 👤 have high blood pressure;
- 👤 have a family history of heart disease;
- 👤 are not physically active;
- 👤 are under stress;
- 👤 are postmenopausal.

Is It “Just Heartburn” ... or More?

Women may experience early signs of heart disease differently from men. Their symptoms can be far more subtle. If you experience these signs, seek medical attention right away:

- 👤 shortness of breath, often without pain of any kind;
- 👤 flu-like nausea, clamminess or cold sweats;
- 👤 unexplained fatigue, weakness or dizziness;
- 👤 chest discomfort that feels like heartburn;
- 👤 pain in your upper body—arms, back, shoulders, neck or jaw;
- 👤 feelings of anxiety, loss of appetite, general discomfort.

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women age 35 and older.
- Women under age 50 have fewer heart attacks. When they do have an attack, it is usually deadlier.
- Close to 450,000 women have heart attacks each year. 83,000 of them are under age 65.
- Although most women fear breast cancer more, heart attacks claim six times as many female lives every year.
- Every year for more than 20 years, heart disease has killed more women than men. The death rate for women continues to rise.
- Women with diabetes are two to three times more likely to have a heart attack.
- Subtle heart disease symptoms often go unrecognized and untreated in women.
- Simple changes in lifestyle and diet can significantly reduce your risk of heart disease.

Polina Sadikov, MD, works with patients at LifestagesSM–Samaritan Centers For Women to prevent heart attacks. “As with men, a woman’s risk of heart

disease increases with age,” Dr. Sadikov explains. “We used to think that falling estrogen levels caused this increased risk. Now we know there is more to it than that. Smoking, diet, stress and lack of exercise have a big impact, too.”

Dr. Sadikov urges her patients to follow healthy lifestyles and control their risk factors. “Obviously, you can’t change your age or family history. But you can control your environment—how you live, eat and exercise,” she says.

At LifestagesSM, women age 40 or older may choose to have a thorough screening for heart disease. Concerned about her heart health, Englewood resident Bonnie Frederick, 53, has been working with Dr. Sadikov to control some of her risk factors. “I can’t change the fact that there is heart disease on both sides of my family,” says Frederick, “but Dr. Sadikov is helping me manage my high cholesterol.”

In addition to monitoring the classic risk factors for heart disease (*see box, above left*), Dr. Sadikov also urges her LifestagesSM patients to see their doctors regularly and to care for themselves as



Polina Sadikov, MD, a member of Family Physicians of Englewood

they would care for loved ones. “Women may show different heart attack symptoms (*see box, above right*), but the disease is the same,” notes Dr. Sadikov. Being female won’t protect you from having a heart attack.”

For more information on women’s midlife screening for heart disease, contact LifestagesSM–Samaritan Centers For Women at 937/277-8988 or 937/274-5420.