

Heart Disease

Someone told me that heart disease kills more women than breast cancer. Is this true?

American women are in denial about cardiovascular disease. A recent survey by the American Heart Association revealed only 13% of women considered cardiovascular disease as their greatest health risk. No disease or condition claims as many lives as heart disease. In fact, heart disease claims more lives than the next 6 causes of death combined. According to the American Heart Association, cardiovascular disease has killed more women than men every year since 1984.

What are risk factors for heart disease?

There are many risk factors including genetic and environmental factors. Besides age and race there are four major risk factors. They are high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking and obesity. Other factors include increased cholesterol, poor nutrition and a sedentary life style.

Is there a difference in heart disease between men and women?

There are gender differences in coronary artery disease. The symptoms of crushing chest pain radiating down the left arm frequently seen in men may be less obvious with women. Their symptoms may be vague such as indigestion. Women have less chance of surviving a heart attack than men. Forty-two percent of women who have heart attacks die within one year compared with 24% of men. Women tend to develop heart disease about 10 years later in life compared with men, and women are more likely to have co-existing chronic conditions.

Does baby aspirin daily prevent heart disease in women?

No. A study published in 2006 revealed aspirin therapy for primary prevention of heart attacks is very effective in men with a 32% reduction. Women did not have a reduced heart attack rate. However, there was a significant reduction in strokes of 24%. This reduction was greatest in women over 65. Anyone (both men and women) who has had a heart attack should take aspirin.

Is being overweight and inactive that important for risk of heart attack?

Both obesity and physical inactivity independently contribute to coronary artery disease. A 2006 Report from the Nurses Health study show a 340% increase in coronary heart disease in women who were both obese and sedentary; a 250% increase in women who were obese but active; and a 150% increase in women who were not obese but sedentary. Obviously, living an active lifestyle, and being leaner decrease your chance of having a heart attack.

What is C-Reactive protein and how is it important in heart disease?

C-Reactive protein (CRP) is a blood test that is a marker of inflammation in the body. High Levels (above 3 mg/l) are a risk factor for coronary heart disease. However, elevated CRP appears to have a similar significance as other risk factors such as obesity, hypertension, smoking, diabetes, high blood lipids and sedentary life style. It is not recommended as a routine screen for patients who have no other risk factors.

I do not exercise and I am slightly overweight. How do I start a good exercise program?

This is a difficult question to answer because many other health and risk factors are important to know. In general terms, some cardiologists may recommend purchasing a pedometer so you can see how much you are walking. Generally, 2000 steps is equivalent to a mile. The goal is to do

10,000 steps each day or the equivalent of a 5 mile walk. The average American walks approximately 2300 steps a day. You should increase your steps gradually, possibly 2000 steps every 1 to 2 weeks until you reach 10,000 steps. Each mile you walk burns 100 calories. You should lose weight gradually (1/2 to one pound per week).

How many calories are in one pound of weight?

To lose one pound you need to cut out 3,500 calories a week. This can be done by walking 5 miles a day or reducing your caloric intake. Most successful weight loss programs combine dietary modifications and increased exercise levels to achieve the ideal weight. Decreasing calories below 1200 per day is not recommended. Low-calorie diets may lead to muscle tissue loss, inadequate nutrition, and hunger. Aim for a balanced approach. Emphasize the addition of high fiber foods (whole fruit, vegetables, whole grains) and decrease additional fat and sugar sources, while increasing your exercise level for a winning combination at the weight loss game.