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Heart Disease: The Silent Killer Of Women

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Coronary artery disease is the leading cause of mortality among American women over the age of 25, and is percent of all deaths in this group. The problem is especially severe among black women who are more likely coronary artery disease, the most common form of heart disease. Approximately 435,000 American women percent of these women will die within a year compared to 21 percent of men.

"In spite of mounting evidence that obesity, diabetes, and hypertension contribute significantly to the develop potentially modifiable risk factors are rising among women, who also are quitting smoking at a slower rate the cardiovascular epidemiologist at Weill Cornell Medical College of Cornell University. "Moreover, when confroi attack, an all too common manifestation of coronary artery disease, women tend to wait longer than men to g that often can be lethal."

Because of its importance, clinical epidemiologists and other health professionals are trying to learn why won cardiac health than they should and, though far from conclusive, some interesting answers have begun to err possible reason is the common belief that heart disease is an illness reserved for men or only for the elderly, of women in nearly every age group. She notes that "only about 13 percent of women view heart disease as 'heart-healthy' lifestyle changes or seek appropriate care."

A second reason, she adds, are she further adds that "gender differences in presentation in some manifestat heart attack symptoms in women sometimes do not fit the better-known picture of heart attack symptoms fou a common presentation, on average, women are less likely than men to experience classic mid- or left-sided shoulder, arm, neck or jaw, and are more likely to experience upper-stomach, mid to low stomach and back p chest discomfort. At the same time, women are more likely to complain of nausea and shortness of breath, bi

Dr. Supino further comments that "as a result of these differences, some women may not realize that they are may believe their symptoms to be gastrointestinal.... Even when such symptoms are recognized as cardiac ir may be delayed because of preference for of self-treatment, bad advice from family members or friends, grea that are not as yet well understood a desire to self-treat in order to maintain control of their lives." The effects notes that "once a heart attack occurs, heart muscle begins to die. Coronary reperfusion with thrombolytic the hours after a heart attack may dramatically improve a patient's chance of survival, but benefit rapidly declines

Dr Supino suggests that a third reason may be a disproportionate focus on breast cancer, which many wome and potential killer. In support of this view, a report from the National Center for Health statistics showed that far more than they fear dying from heart disease, even though breast cancer causes relatively far fewer death

"The relative lack of attention that women display towards their own cardiac health is mirrored by the health care experience of male patients," she remarks. For example, for many years, women were excluded from or not designed to test the effectiveness of new drugs, devices and procedures. As a result, the utility of these interventions, Dr. Supino notes that "diagnostic tests are less likely to be ordered to evaluate chest pain in women than in men presentations in women and the belief by many of their physicians that their patient is unlikely to have coronary

Even when ordered, certain diagnostic tests may not be as accurate in women, in part, because of their unique anatomy. Treating physicians tend to be slower to recognize heart attacks in women because "classic" chest pain and ECG changes on electrocardiogram occur less frequently in women than in men. Lack of an accurate diagnosis invariably delays treatment of such delay may be dire. Dr. Supino notes that "once a heart attack occurs, heart muscle begins to die. Coronary artery therapy during the first 1-2 hours after a heart attack may dramatically improve a patient's chance of survival,

She adds, "Even after a documented heart attack, women tend to be offered aggressive therapy such as coronary artery bypass grafting more frequently than men, though such therapies have the potential to improve survival. When such therapy is offered late in the disease, at a more advanced age, and in the setting of other medical problems--bringing with it the increased risk of complications, 42 percent of women who have heart attacks will die within a year compared to 24 percent among men. And 18 percent of men will have another heart attack within 6 years."

Dr. Supino urges that "heightened awareness of these issues is important to patients and health care providers to improve outcomes among women. There is hope that recent initiatives sponsored by the American Heart Association, the National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease to promote in the area of women's health, awareness, research, and focused research and media attention, will help to reverse these disparities and save many lives each year."

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