

Women's Health

Healthy Hearts in 2010



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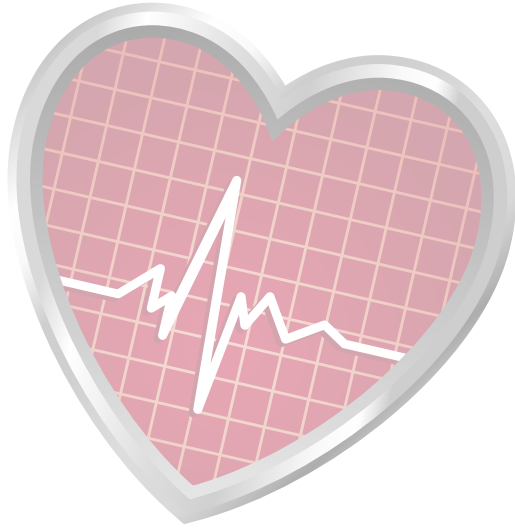
Hearth health is a topic that is frequently talked and written about. We see the American Heart Association recommendations and endorsements everywhere. When we are young, we can take our healthy hearts for granted. As women (and men) age, heart disease is more likely to rear its ugly head. Prevention is a huge issue in heart disease as with many other diseases.

The term "heart disease" refers to a large spectrum of disorders that affect both the heart and the blood vessels of the heart.

Coronary heart disease (CAD) is the most common form of heart disease and is the leading cause of heart attacks. In CAD, the arteries become hard and narrow; these changes can limit the blood supply to the heart. When the heart muscle does not receive enough blood, ischemic changes within the heart muscle can occur causing pain (angina) and potentially a heart attack (myocardial infarction). Other forms of heart diseases include congestive heart failure (the heart is not able to pump blood as well) and heart arrhythmias.

Among U.S. women who die each year, 1 in 4 dies of heart disease. As women get older, they are more likely to develop heart disease; however, women of all ages should be concerned and should take steps to prevent heart disease in the future. Certain risk factors increase the likelihood of developing heart disease. These factors include obesity, lack of physical activity, hypertension (high blood pressure), diabetes, smoking and elevated blood lipids.

Typical signs of a heart attack include chest/arm/neck pain, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness and abnormal heart beats. However, heart disease often has no symptoms. Women are more likely to have typical or common symptoms of a heart attack, but women are also more likely (than men) to have atypical symptoms such as fatigue or weakness, cough, heartburn or diminished appetite. Therefore, awareness of risk factors for heart disease is particularly important for women. Family history of heart disease (particularly heart attacks in younger individuals) is a strong predictor of an individual's risk for heart attack.



There are many things women can do to lower their personal risk of heart disease. We cannot change our genetic make up, but we can make lifestyle changes now that will impact our heart health later. The American Heart Association offers a brief synopsis of preventative measures:

- Be active-regular physical exercise can lower a woman's risk of heart disease (and other diseases as well)
- Don't smoke
- Eat healthy
- Maintain a normal weight (easier to do if you are physically active!)
- Know your numbers (Blood pressure, blood lipid levels)

These recommendations sound straight forward and simple, but adherence to this type of lifestyle is not easy for many women. Women (and men) develop bad habits that are hard to break. Often weight loss means a complete change in a person's lifestyle. Hopefully, medical professionals will encourage their patients to make these changes and support them in this process with appropriate referrals, educational materials and moral support!

I would urge everyone to check out the American Heart Association website for more information and practical advice.

Best wishes for a healthy heart in 2010!

