

Physician Urges Regular Heart Health Screenings

Heart disease is the number one killer of American women, claiming the lives of one in three women. Heart disease can also lead to significantly decreased quality of life.

“Unfortunately, many women don’t realize that heart disease is a major women’s health concern, and not just a ‘man’s disease,’” says Heidi Decker, MD, of HealthReach Community Health Centers’ Western Maine Family Health Center.

The major risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, being overweight, physical inactivity and smoking. Dr. Decker recommends that women, especially those at-risk, schedule regular heart-health screenings to monitor these key factors. “All of these are controllable, and becoming educated about the normal ranges of these heart-health indicators can help women make adjustments leading to better health,” she says.

Other risk factors include diabetes,



Heidi Decker, MD, of Western Maine Family Health Center in Livermore Falls, urges all women to have regular heart-health screenings.

family history of heart disease and age.

Here are some health tips from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National

Institutes of Health that may help women prevent heart disease:

Don’t smoke. Recent research has shown that smokers are likely to have a coronary event at least 10 years sooner than non-smokers – regardless of the presence or absence of other major risk factors, and that deaths dropped by 36 percent among those who’d stopped smoking.

Eat for heart health. If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, follow an eating plan low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and limit your intake of salt and other forms of sodium. Those with high cholesterol should increase their intake of soluble fiber and cholesterol-lowering foods; those with high blood pressure who drink alcoholic beverages should do so in moderation.

Be physically active. Regular physical activity helps prevent and control heart disease and its major risk factors.

Aim for a healthy weight. If you are overweight, aim to lose no more than ½ to 2 pounds per week.

“It is vitally important that women also be aware of the symptoms or heart disease and the warning signs of a heart attack and it is critical that those experiencing these symptoms not wait too long before getting help,” says Dr. Decker. Women are often

Get Active

Here are few tips from the American Heart Association to increase physical activities while indoors.

- ♥ Write physical activity appointments into your daily planner or computer schedule. Respect them as you would any other appointment.
- ♥ Don’t stay in your office for eight hours straight. You need at least two 15-minute breaks throughout the day. Take five of those 15 minutes to walk or do stretches. It will energize you and add to your fitness level.
- ♥ Join an exercise class. Community recreation centers often offer low-cost options!
- ♥ Take the stairs whenever you can. Each flight burns 10 calories! (A flight is about 10-12 steps.) Use the steps to do ankle lifts and calf stretches, too.
- ♥ While talking on the phone, stretch your arms and legs and do squats or lunges or “wall sit.”

less likely than men to believe they’re having a heart attack and more likely to delay in seeking emergency treatment.

According to the NHLBI, women tend to be about 10 years older than men when they have a heart attack and are more likely to have other conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and congestive heart failure – making it all the more vital that they get proper treatment fast. Although some come on suddenly and are intense, most heart attacks start slowly, and initially the pain and discomfort can be mild. (See Heart Attack Signs, page 5)

As with men, women’s most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

If you feel heart attack symptoms, do not delay. Remember, minutes matter! Call 9-1-1. Your family will thank you for seeking treatment fast.

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