Did you know....?

- Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) is responsible for 7.6 million deaths globally
- CHD is the leading cause of death worldwide
- CHD is the leading cause of death for women in most industrialized nations
- Symptoms present themselves differently in men and women, leading to difficulty in diagnosing CHD in women
- Some risk factors are more significant in women than in men
- Women may respond differently to treatments

What is CHD?

CHD is a cardiovascular disease associated with the heart and its vessels. It is commonly associated with plaque build-up in the coronary arteries, a condition which can prevent oxygen-rich blood from reaching the heart.

References


Coronary Heart Disease in Women

An Informational Brochure for Women

Tricia Chesson and Jennifer Ford
**Risk Factors**

The main risk factors for CHD include:
- Unhealthy diet
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Age
- Heredity
- Smoking

Certain risk factors are more significant for women than men. These include diabetes. For example, diabetic women with a previous history of heart attack (myocardial infarction) are twice as likely to have another heart attack and four times as likely to develop heart failure.

Hormone therapy may increase women’s risk for CHD. Estrogen protects women from CHD before menopause, but after menopause the female body loses the ability to process estrogen. This converts estrogen’s normally protective effects to harmful effects.

**Symptoms**

Classic CHD Symptoms:
- Chest pain (angina)
- Shortness of breath
- Tightness, heaviness, pressure behind the breast bone

Women are less likely to experience angina, and angina is a less effective predictor of CHD or MI. Women are more likely to have:
- Dyspnea (difficulty breathing)
- Fatigue
- Abdominal, neck and shoulder pain

Because of the difference in symptoms, women are more likely to be misdiagnosed.

Change in Age-Adjusted Death Rates for CHD by Country, for women ages 35-74, 1990-1999

Source: NHLBI 2002 Chart Book on Cardiovascular, Lung, and Blood Diseases

**Treatment/Prevention**

Men are, in general, more aggressively treated for CHD than are women. Women are less likely to be treated with aspirin or beta-blockers. However, while aspirin therapy is effective in women, aspirin resistance is 4 times more likely in women than in men. The simplest treatment for CHD is prevention. By avoiding risk factors such as smoking, not exercising, and eating an unhealthy diet, the risk for CHD can be greatly reduced.