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WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE

Cardiovascular disease is a rampant problem with Americans, but there are some gender differences that can be crucial to know. Many women do not know about the prevalence of heart disease and related problems, and the subtle ways it can present with women. We've all heard about the stressed-out guy who has the "classic" heart attack, but what about a woman who feels a sense of impending doom, can't sleep, and is sweating and having trouble breathing? She too may be having a heart attack.

Everyone should know their blood pressure (and have their blood pressures checked in the extremities, and the neck as well), and their cholesterol numbers. Some of us have a genetic predisposition to cardiovascular disease and its symptoms or risk factors. Some of these are referred to as silent symptoms. For example, a woman in her late forties, who is active and fit, may still be at risk for heart attack or stroke due to high cholesterol or high blood pressure. High cholesterol can be an indicator of clogged arteries and reduced arterial flow. Patients have complained to me about fatigue, or slight trouble breathing, and when we look: sure enough – heart disease.

What can we do to help recognize risk, and keep women living longer and healthier? Here are just a few places to start:

Have a thorough annual physical exam at your physician's office

Speak candidly with your doctor about your family history, lifestyle habits (including smoking), and any time you feel anxious, fatigued, have trouble breathing, or any pain in the chest or extremities. Ask your physician to speak with you about your weight, BMI (body mass index), and routine blood and lab tests. If he/she suggests speaking with a specialist or trying medication and/or lifestyle change, consider it strongly.

Get moving

A sedentary lifestyle compounds any risk factors, so keep active. Little things like climbing the stairs instead of the elevator, walking or riding a bicycle to work, and even taking a break every so often to stretch for a few moments fights fatigue and keeps the blood flowing.

A lot can be accomplished in small doses, and even a half an hour a day of walking can make a huge impact on your health. I advocate swimming a lot, because it's kind to the joints and you can get a great workout in a short amount of time. Our bodies were made to move, and our hearts were meant to create flow – let's help them all we can!

Keep an eye on your diet (including lattes)

A few things are critical here to note, but I will start with this: watch caffeinated beverages or those with certain chemicals like ephedra, which can cause heart rhythms to rapidly increase and usually are filled with sugar, disguised as “healthy”. Water is always a good bet, and helps proper liver and kidney function as well.

Many women I know either count calories or try to find the correct mix of food groups, but really, both are necessary for optimal health. Speak with your physician or a nutritionist to find a balanced program for your needs.

Making some changes and becoming more educated about your heart can not only reduce risk of cardiovascular disease, but also increase wellness and longevity. That’s the greatest gift you can give to yourself, or anyone in your life: the gift of health.

For more information about women’s heart health, check out: www.goredforwomen.org, or contact the American Heart Association.

Listen to Dr. Galichia’s Radio Show – “Take Your Health to Heart” every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to **GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com**. We would love to hear from you!!!

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