

WHAT'S UP DOC PETE?

My best girl friend never knew she had cardiac disease and had a heart attack at age 37. Is this unusual? What are the risks for women?



Peter J. Muran, MD

An American Heart Association survey indicates that even though 46% of women are aware of heart disease as a leading cause of death only 13 % believe they are personally at risk. Women believe that they are not vulnerable to heart disease until after menopause and consequently ignore the prevention available to them. Four beliefs that give women false comfort are:

Estrogen protects me. While the presence of estrogen is why women typically do not develop heart disease until well after menopause, poor life-style habits can undermine this advantage. Smoking, diabetes, insulin resistance, hypertension, BMI (body mass index) greater than 25%, high cholesterol and use of synthetic hormones (birth control pills or Premarin) erase any protection that natural or bio-identical estrogen provides.

Heart Disease Doesn't Start Until After Menopause. The ground work is laid in childhood and adolescence. Over-weight children as young as five frequently have at least one risk factor for developing heart disease. Studies have found fatty streaks, precursors to plaque, in the arteries of children as young as nine. The good news is that adopting a healthy lifestyle at any age can reverse these risks.

All Heart Attacks Look Alike. Women don't always get the classic chest pain we associate with heart attacks. Instead women may have fatigue, nausea, shortness of breath, indigestion or back, shoulder or jaw pain. These subtle symptoms are often ignored resulting in critical delays for proper care.

Only LDL Cholesterol Matters. For women, raising levels of healthy HDL and lowering triglycerides may be more important. But cholesterol is only one of ten markers you should know to calculate your risk including blood pressure, blood glucose, BMI, C-reactive protein and serum amyloid alpha (indicators of inflammation), homocysteine (an amino acid which may damage artery walls), fibrinogen (a protein produced by the liver that forms blood clots), lipoprotein (a form of "bad cholesterol) and coronary artery calcium score.

Knowledge is the best protection against heart disease. Know your scores on these ten markers and learn how you can reverse them naturally. You are important, you are someone's Valentine!



Peter J. Muran, MD
Board Certified in Holistic Medicine

1405 Garden Street
San Luis Obispo
805-548-0987

Email your question through
www.longevityhealthcare.com