

March 23, 15 Better Health for Women series with CTV News at Noon

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Heart Disease and Women

Heart Disease and Stroke is the leading cause of death for women. It is important to assess your own health risks and be proactive in reducing your risks of a deadly heart disease.

The five major risk factors that you cannot control are: your age, your gender (being female is a lower risk until you reach menopause), your family history (close family members with heart disease or stroke), and your ethnic background (First Nation, African or South Asian descent).

Risk factors that you can do something about are:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Smoking
- High blood cholesterol
- Being overweight
- Physical inactivity
- Stress

It is thought that 94% of risks for heart disease can be decreased, so even if you have a strong family history, there are things that you can do to optimize your health.

There is an interesting study that has gone on for years called the Nurses' Health Study. From 1991-2011, 88,940 nurses between the **ages of 27 and 44** enrolled in this study and have been followed for twenty years. Imagine that dedication! Researchers have found that 73% of coronary heart disease and 46% of clinical cardiovascular disease is caused by not living a healthy lifestyle. This study identified 6 factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle:

- Not smoking
- Having a normal body mass index
- Being physically active for at least 2.5 hours each week.
- Watching less than 7 hours of TV each week
- Following a diet which contains at least 40% of the top foods in the Alternative Healthy Eating Index. This index provides dietary guidelines to

combat major chronic diseases by determining the quality of 9 dietary components: veggies, fruits, nuts and soy, white or red meat, trans fat, polyunsaturated fat, fibre, multivitamin use, and alcohol.

- Keeping alcohol intake low, a maximum of 14.9 gms per day, which is one 12oz beer, 5oz of wine or 1.5oz of hard liquor.

Those who practised all six healthy behaviors had the lowest risk of Cardiovascular Disease. They were 92% less likely to develop Cardiovascular Disease than those who didn't follow a healthy lifestyle! This underlines the importance of starting early to develop healthy lifestyles. There is no safe time to continue smoking.

There were 456 heart attacks (myocardial Infarctions) in those women in the study. 32,000 were diagnosed with one or more risk factors, including Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol. **The average age of heart disease diagnosis was 50, and the average age for diagnosis for women with one risk factor was 47.**

Heavy alcohol use was associated with greater risk but was lowest risk with consuming 5 oz wine, 12 ounces of beer, or 1.5 ounces of spirits/day. Unfortunately, while this may have a benefit on your heart, it increases your risk of breast cancer by about 12%!

This is great news but the challenge is to get the word out and help women truly GET IT that what they are doing today can affect their future life! We need to develop programs to help them make the change and truly enjoy a healthy future.

Citation; Chomistek AK, Chiuve SE, Eliassen AH, et al Healthy Lifestyle in the Primordial Prevention of CVD among young women. J Am Coll Cardiol 2015;65(1):43-51

Tasnime N Akbaraly, Jane Ferrie et al Alternative Healthy eating Index and mortality over 18 years of follow-up The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 2011 Jul;94(1); 247-253

Resources for Heart Health:

Learn about the choices you can make to reduce your risks and to recognize the warning signs of a heart attack or stroke...it could save a life and that life may be your own!

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada www.heartandstroke.ca

Toll Free: 1-888-HSINFO (473-4636)