

The Female Risk Factor for Developing Heart Disease

“I never thought that it would be me having a heart attack...”

Heart disease is often thought of as a man’s problem, rather than a woman’s. But if you are female you may be at a higher risk for heart disease than you think.

Women are more likely to die from heart disease than from all forms of cancer combined---including breast cancer.

And if you are an African American woman with heart disease you need to be especially careful. Studies have shown that African American women have almost twice the risk of stroke as white women. Heart disease is also a major cause of death for Hispanic and Native Americans.

Women tend to develop heart disease later in life than men. This may be partly because throughout your life, hormones, including the female hormone estrogen, have been protecting your heart.

But in your early 50’s, as you are going through menopause, some of the risk factors for heart disease increase.

Every woman’s menopause experience is different. Some women suffer early menopause and lingering symptoms, some experience later changes and symptoms.

These symptoms can interrupt the usual function of sleep, mood, sexual drive and other life changes.

If you are considering hormone replacement therapy to decrease your symptoms of menopause, talk to your healthcare provider first.

There are many options to manage the symptoms of menopause.

“When I was first diagnosed with heart failure, I was 39 years old. I was having trouble-- I was very tired, just abnormally tired.”

Because heart disease can be overlooked in women, you need to be active in your own healthcare.

“I learn in the hard way that it’s up to me to advocate for my own health. No one knows your body better than you do.”

Even though heart disease is often thought of as a man’s disease, as a woman, you may be at risk for heart disease. Go ahead and put yourself and your heart on the top of your priority list. And make sure your heart gets the attention it needs.