

[IMAGE]

## Coronary Heart Disease in Women: Know the Risks

Traditionally, coronary heart disease (CHD) has been considered a disease that primarily affects men.

Statistics indicate, however, that approximately 250,000 women die from CHD, and a 2002 study found that 28 percent of all women above age 50 die from coronary heart disease, making it the leading cause of death for women in that age group.

As with men, the reasons women develop CHD vary, but the most likely risk factors include hypertension, smoking, obesity and lack of exercise. A recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association* examined these factors, and provided the following suggestions for lowering the risk of CHD:

- **Maintain healthy blood pressure.** Studies have found that women with high blood pressure have a 3- to 4-fold increased risk of CHD, but that even minor reductions in diastolic blood pressure can have a significant lower the risk of CHD. Among the best ways to reduce hypertension are lifestyle changes, such as increasing physical activity, reducing weight, and decreasing alcohol and salt intake.
- **Quit smoking.** To help female smokers fight their addiction to cigarettes, the researchers recommended using nicotine replacement products, and adding agents such as bupropion to reduce cravings. They also stressed the role of the health practitioner in providing counsel and support.
- **Avoid excess weight gain/obesity.** While there is no direct evidence that losing weight alone reduces the risk of CHD, weight loss does decrease blood pressure and may improve blood cholesterol levels, both of which are important factors for heart disease. As with smoking, the researchers noted that health care providers can affect their patients by providing information on diet and nutrition and encouraging them to adopt healthy eating habits.
- **Exercise consistently.** Dozens of studies have shown that a lack of exercise can increase the risk of a cardiovascular event, while regular exercise strengthens the heart and increases blood flow. Health care providers should encourage regular exercise as one of the best ways to lower the risk of CHD.

While coronary heart disease is prevalent in the elderly female population, it's not inevitable. By living a healthy lifestyle, exercising regularly, eating a nutritious, well-balanced diet and avoiding (or stopping) smoking, women can significantly lower their risk of CHD. Your doctor of chiropractic can create a lifestyle

plan that incorporates elements of the above factors, and will help reduce your chances of suffering a cardiovascular event.

### *Reference*

Hong S, Friedman J, Alt S. Modifiable risk factors for the primary prevention of heart disease in women. *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association* 2003;58(4), pp. 278-284.

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