

Women's heart health: Screening is key

According to the American Heart Association, almost twice as many women die from cardiovascular disease than from all types of cancer combined, and approximately 218,000 women die from coronary heart disease each year.

While the risk for cardiovascular disease is two to three times higher in postmenopausal women, Nancy Trujillo, director of Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital's cardiovascular services department, says premenopausal women are also at risk. This is supported by research that found

heart disease in women ages 35 to 44 actually increased annually between 1997 and 2002.

Recognizing symptoms

Many women do not know the warning signs of a heart attack. Chest pain is the most common warning sign in both men and women, but women can also have signs of extreme fatigue, shortness of breath and nausea.

"Many times, women think they're simply over-extending themselves or they're stressed, when in fact they're having a heart attack," says Candace J. Cymerman, manager of the Clinic for Invasive and Noninvasive Cardiovascular Services at Good Shepherd Hospital.

What you can do

"Preventing heart attacks in women simply comes down to screening and taking care of yourself with more exercise, healthy eating and more downtime," says Cymerman.

Cardiac screenings increase a woman's awareness of her cardiac risk factors and provide an opportunity to learn what she can do to make a positive difference. Unfortunately, women often do not see themselves at risk for heart disease as they do for breast cancer, says Trujillo. About nine in 10 American women ages 40 to 70 have one or more risk factors for cardiovascular disease, yet less than 30 percent are aware of their risk.

Our screening center

Good Shepherd Hospital recently opened its Early Detection and Prevention Center in Crystal Lake,

offering two cardiovascular screening programs—the *Check and Chat screening*, which measures blood pressure, waist circumference, cholesterol levels, blood sugar, tobacco status and stress; and the *Cardiac (Heart) Calcium screening*, which includes all of the *Check and Chat* screenings plus a CT image of the cardiac arteries to identify the presence of calcified plaque. Results from both screenings are known immediately and sent to your physician.

Women are encouraged to visit the Early Detection and Prevention Center for a cardiac screening. Screenings performed here are all accompanied by a counseling session with a cardiac trained nurse during which all risk factors for heart disease are assessed and ways to improve cardiac health are discussed. The patient takes an active role in the decisions that are made. Additional educational resources are available, and the center can refer a patient to a specialist, if needed.

"Screening is vital in 'knowing your numbers,'" says Rosie Jeretina, supervisor of cardiac and pulmonary rehab. Fortunately, most cardiovascular disease in women is preventable. By knowing your numbers and controlling your risk factors, you can experience a healthy life for a long time.

> Are you heart-healthy?

For more information or to make an appointment at the Early Detection and Prevention Center, call **1-800-3-ADVOCATE (1-800-323-8622)** and mention code 3C27.

