

## NEWS



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### Heart Health Month

**Norristown, PA (February 15, 2013)** – February is all about the heart. The color red can be seen throughout the month in Valentine's Day cards and other symbols of love. During the month of hearts, it is scary to think about heart health statistics. Heart disease is the number one killer of women today. This health condition that takes the life of one woman per minute may also be one of the most misunderstood diseases.

Heart disease affects the body's blood vessels and cardiovascular system. Over time, plaque may build up in the walls of the arteries in the heart, narrowing the artery walls, and making it difficult for blood to flow through. Eventually, a clot can form and stop the blood flow. This can cause either a heart attack or a stroke. But there are other forms of heart disease as well:

- Heart failure or congestive heart failure—the heart is working, but can't pump enough blood throughout the body.
- Arrhythmia or abnormal rhythm of the heart—the heart is either beating too fast, too slow, or irregularly, which affects the heart's functioning.
- Heart valve problems—sometimes heart valves do not open enough or close properly, which can cause blood to leak through or flow backwards.

Ninety percent (90%) of women have one or more risk factors for heart disease. There are risk factors that can be controlled, and risk factors that cannot be controlled. Women can take charge of their heart health by making the healthy choices listed below:

- Don't smoke
- Manage blood sugar
- Get blood pressure under control
- Lower cholesterol
- Know family history of heart disease
- Stay active
- Get to a healthy weight
- Eat healthy, natural, non-processed foods

Factors like cholesterol, eating habits, and smoking are things women can control and change. Women who are thin may have high cholesterol, and women who exercise regularly and eat healthy may have a family history of heart disease. It is important to know the risk factor(s) and to make lifestyle adjustments accordingly!

Sixty four percent (64%) of women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease had no previous symptoms, which is why it's so important to be conscious of factors such as weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels. A common misunderstanding of heart attacks is that extreme chest pain is the only symptom. Symptoms, if present, vary between men and women. Heart attack symptoms specific to women are listed below:

- Shortness of breath
- Jaw pain
- Nausea/vomiting
- Dizziness/lightheadedness/fainting
- Extreme fatigue

Stroke is the number four cause of death in the United States, and the leading cause of severe, long-term disability. Warning signs of stroke include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm, leg, or on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing or blurred vision in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance/coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Heart disease affects women of all ages and ethnicities. Some people are born with underlying heart conditions, while others are at a greater risk due to overeating or living a sedentary lifestyle. Hispanic and African American women also have a greater risk for heart disease compared to Caucasian women. All women need to be heart healthy and evaluate their individual habits. Here are some tools to keeping health in check this February:

- Drink more water, which leaves less room for sugary foods and drinks
- Go green by eating seasonal, natural fruits and vegetables instead of high-fat, high-sodium processed foods
- Eat more fiber, like whole grains that aids digestions and lowers the risk of heart disease
- Quit smoking
- Get routine checkups
- Be as active as possible
- Consider low-dose aspirin and talk to your family physician