



WOMEN'S HEART ALLIANCE

The Facts on Women and Heart Disease

Heart disease is the #1 killer of women in the U.S., killing more women than all cancers combined.ⁱ Yet, 45 percent of women don't know it's their #1 killer.ⁱⁱ Heart disease claims more than 400,000 women's lives each year. That's nearly one death each minute.ⁱⁱⁱ Since 1984, more women than men have died each year from heart disease.^{iv}

Despite the fact that heart disease is women's #1 killer, few women (27%) can name a woman in their lives with heart disease. Even fewer (11%) can name a woman who has died from it. And 76 percent of women say they rarely talk about heart disease among family and friends.^v This perpetuates a lack of awareness of and action against the disease.

African American and Hispanic women are at even greater risk for heart disease.^{vi} Of African American women ages 20 and older, nearly half (48.9%) have heart disease^{vii}, yet only 1-in-5 thinks she is personally at risk, and just half know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack.^{viii}

Women have more repeat heart attacks and greater risk of stroke after a heart attack.^{ix} Forty-two percent of women who have heart attacks die within 1 year compared with 24 percent of men.^x Women who have a heart attack are twice as likely to die within the first two weeks as compared to men.^{xi}

Women's hearts are different than men's hearts.^{xii} Yet many women (41%)^{xiii} and doctors (51% of primary care physicians and 48% of cardiologists) disagree with this statement.^{xiv}

In nearly half of all heart attacks among women, they don't have the typical male symptoms.^{xv} As a result, women are often misdiagnosed and go untreated.

For the last 50 years, women's treatment has largely been based on medical research on men.^{xvi} Today, women comprise only 24% of participants in all heart-related studies.^{xvii}

Concern over heart disease is not translating into conversations with doctors. While women rank heart disease as one of their top health concerns, nearly half (46%) almost never bring up the subject with their doctor. Many (49%) assume doctors will bring it for them.^{xviii} Among doctors, heart disease ranks 3rd among their top concerns

for women and they report that women are more likely to bring up weight or breast health than heart disease.^{xix}

There is a best practice gap in diagnosing and treating women. Most doctors are not performing many of the key steps needed to assess the current and lifetime risk of heart disease.^{xx}

We are not spending enough on women's heart disease research. Only a small fraction (\$246 million) of the National Institutes of Health budget is spent on women's heart disease research. In comparison, \$959 million is spent on women's cancer research (breast, ovarian, cervical, endometrial and uterine).^{xxi} Research funding has been critical to understand the causes of and treatments for cancer. We need that same research funding to fully understand women's heart disease.

Time for Action

It's time to fight back. The Women's Heart Alliance (WHA) was formed to encourage action on women's heart health. The WHA is a unique collaboration between two of America's leading medical institutions, the Barbra Streisand Women's Heart Center at Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute and the Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute at New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, and two major philanthropists in business and entertainment, Barbra Streisand and Ronald O. Perelman.

The Women's Heart Alliance created the Fight the Ladykiller campaign to encourage women to talk to their healthcare providers and empower them with a single, meaningful action they can take: #getHeartChecked; encourage the medical community to proactively address the screening, diagnostic and therapeutic differences of a woman's heart and talk to patients and peers about women's heart health; and move Congress and federal agencies to action on funding women's heart health research.

The WHA is a project of New Venture Fund, a 501(c)(3) public charity. New Venture Fund hosts and incubates a wide range of conservation, education, global health and other charitable projects.

For additional information, please email contact@womensheartalliance.org.

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- ⁱ Murphy SL, Xu JQ, Kochanek KD. (2013). Deaths: Final data for 2010. National vital statistics reports; vol 61 no 4. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
- ⁱⁱ GfK Research (2014, September). Women's Survey, Survey conducted with 1,011 U.S. women ages 25-60.
- ⁱⁱⁱ American Heart Association & American Stroke Association. (2014). Heart disease and stroke statistics—2014 update: a report from the American Heart Association
- ^{iv} Causes and prevention of heart disease. (2014) American Heart Association. Retrieved from: https://www.goredforwomen.org/about-heart-disease/facts_about_heart_disease_in_women-sub-category/causes-prevention/
- ^v GfK Research (2014, September).
- ^{vi} American Heart Association. (n.d.). Heart Disease Statistics at a Glance [Fact sheet].
- ^{vii} American Heart Association. (2014).
- ^{viii} American Heart Association. (2013). African Americans & cardiovascular diseases [Fact sheet].
- ^{ix} Association of American Medical Colleges. (2006, July 24). Heart disease in women getting the attention it deserves.
- ^x Women and heart disease fact sheet. (2014) WomenHeart. Retrieved from: http://www.womensheart.org/PDFs/FactSheet_WHD.pdf
- ^{xi} American Heart Association. (2014). Women and heart disease, 237-246.
- ^{xii} Gulati M., Shaw L.J., & Bairey Merz C.N. (2012) Myocardial Ischemia in Women: Lessons from the NHLBI WISE Study. National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute
- ^{xiii} GfK Research (2014, September).
- ^{xiv} Edge Research. (2014, May). Heart Health Physicians Survey. Survey conducted with 199 primary care physicians (including internists, family physicians, general practitioners and OB/GYNs) and 100 cardiologists.
- ^{xv} Gulati M., Shaw L.J., & Bairey Merz C.N. (2012).
- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xvii} Melloni, C., D. B. Mark, P. S. Douglas, R. J. Dolor, K. S. Pieper, A. Stebbins, F. Gunes, T. Y. Wang, J. S. Berger, and L. K. Newby. (2010). "Representation of Women in Randomized Clinical Trials of Cardiovascular Disease Prevention." (Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes 3.2) 135-142.
- ^{xviii} GfK Research (2014, September).
- ^{xix} Edge Research. (2014, May).
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxi} National Institutes of Health. (2014, March). Estimates of Funding for Various Research, Condition, and Disease Categories (RCDC).