

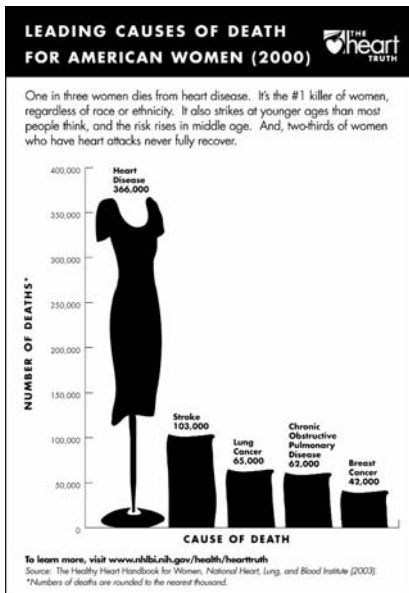
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UPDATES

Heart Disease in Women

April, 2004

When asked what disease women are most afraid of, the majority of American women will answer, breast cancer. Most women do not realize that they have more to fear from heart disease. Heart disease? You may have thought that it is mainly a man's problem, but heart disease does not distinguish between the sexes. In fact, one in three women die of heart disease and two-thirds of women who have heart attacks never fully recover. Heart disease is the #1 killer of American women, claiming the lives of more than 500,000 women each year, more than all other causes combined.



Heart disease develops over time and a woman's risk for heart disease starts to rise considerably during mid-life. The SWAN study is helping to fill the gaps in understanding heart disease and risk factors in women during the menopause transition. High blood pressure and high total cholesterol increase one's risk of developing heart disease. Each time you come for your annual visits we gather information about risk factors to help us understand changes that occur during mid-life.

We recently looked at changes in factors from the beginning of the study to the Year 6 visit. First, let's look at blood pressure. A blood pressure of 120/80 is considered healthy.

We found that African American women as a group had higher blood pressure at their first visit and Year 6 visit than the other ethnic groups. Average blood pressure of the other racial groups stayed about the same and within the normal range. Next time you come in for your annual visit, you will have your blood pressure measured to see if it is in the healthy range.

Another risk factor is weight. The Chinese and Japanese women tended to have the lowest weights at the beginning of the study and five years later while the African American women were the heaviest. Over the first 5 years of the study we found that our participants have gained weight. Looking at the different ethnic groups, the Chinese and Japanese women gained the least, about 4 pounds, while the Hispanic participants gained on average 8 pounds during the five years of the study. The weight gain of our African American and Caucasian participants was, on average, about 6 pounds. Total cholesterol also tended to increase on average over the 5 years in the SWAN participants. A beneficial increase in HDL cholesterol, the "good" cholesterol, was found in all of the ethnic groups, and may contribute a small part to the total cholesterol increase.

Heart Disease in Women, Continued

Excess weight, higher total cholesterol and other factors like lack of exercise can impact on a woman's risk of heart disease. Women often do not take their risk of heart disease seriously - or personally. According to National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's web page, women can lower their heart disease risk by as much as 82 percent just by leading a healthy lifestyle.

Start taking steps today to improve your heart health. The American Heart Association recommends that you stop smoking if you smoke, manage your weight by exercising 30 minutes a day, and follow a heart-healthy diet. These recommendations also have other health benefits. Additionally, exercise can be fun and can make us feel good. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, along with the American Heart Association and 70 other organizations, has started a red dress campaign to raise awareness of women's heart disease. Spread the word – Go Red for Women.

For More Information:

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/index.htm>, 301-592-8573

American Heart Association

<http://www.s2mw.com/simplesolutions/>, 1-800-MY-HEART

Your next visit

The next cycle of visits has started. SWAN is currently in the 9th year of visits. Some of you will be hearing from us by mail this year and then will be back in the clinic next year. We look forward to being in contact with all of you this year.