Matters of the Heart

Some women still believe that heart disease is more of a man-killer, it's not.

February 28, 2013 By Kate Ferguson

A stressed-out, chain-smoking man who eats crappy food and is inundated with work—that is how many women envision heart attack candidates. And although it is true that the prevalence of coronary artery disease among women is lower before menopause, ladies' risk rise after they go through this change of life.

Coronary artery disease (CAD) begins when cholesterol—a waxy, fat-like substance—forms clots in a coronary artery. These arteries supply the heart muscle with oxygen-rich blood, and clots can obstruct this life-sustaining process.

As women approach age 75, their risk of CAD becomes equal to that of men. What's more, CAD is the leading cause of women's death and disability after menopause. The risk factors for women developing CAD are the same as in men: high blood pressure, increased blood cholesterol, diabetes, a family history of CAD at a young age and smoking cigarettes.

According to the American Heart Association, heart disease is still the No. 1 killer of women. But the good news is that it's preventable. The tips they offer to women are simple:

Schedule an appointment with your health care provider to learn your personal risk of heart disease.

Quit smoking. Just one year after you quit, you can cut your risk of CAD by 50 percent.

Start an exercise program. Just a 30-minute walk each day can take you miles away from the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Modify your eating habits. For example, use lower-fat or no-fat ingredients. These healthy substitutions can help you cut down on saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol without forcing you to give up the delicious foods you love. Also, reach for healthier snacks and opt for smarter food preparation methods (think baked instead of fried).

That's right, ladies. Heart disease isn't only a man thing. These easy fixes can make a real difference in lowering your heart disease risk too.

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