

February, 2000

The *Hearts* of Women

Generally, most women don't feel they are at risk for heart disease. Yet, more than 500,000 women die from heart disease annually. February is National Heart Month, a good time to set the record straight about women and heart disease.

Myth #1 - Heart disease is a man's problem. Heart disease is epidemic in women as well as men. Usually, women, on the average, get heart disease 10 years later than men. By then, women are often more concerned about cancer, arthritis and osteoporosis.

Myth #2 - Women have an innate protection against heart disease. Before age 50, women appear to be protected against heart disease by estrogen, which lowers total cholesterol and raises HDL (good) cholesterol. But as women approach menopause, the loss of estrogen is a significant contributor to heart disease risk.

Myth #3 - Women should be more concerned about cancer and osteoporosis. Heart disease ranks far ahead as a cause of death for women, killing nearly *twice* as many women as all forms of cancer combined. One in nine women between 45-64 years of age have some form of cardiovascular disease.

Myth #4 - If a heart attack doesn't kill you, you will recover and be fine. More men have heart attacks than women do and have them earlier in life, however women have less chance of surviving a heart attack. The facts are 44% of women die within a year after a heart attack, compared to 27% of men.

Myth #5 - Stroke strikes randomly without warning. You can't prevent it! Many strokes result from a lifetime of bad habits. To reduce your risk: Don't smoke! Control high blood pressure. Eat well, and get *moving* by walking or through other activities you enjoy. Get regular checkups. Learn stroke warning signs and get emergency medical help if they appear.

It's never too late to adopt healthier habits to reduce your risk for chronic disease, such as heart disease. Start taking better care of yourself...you deserve it!

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Raising Kind Children

We all want caring, kind children. Encouraging kindness in children is an important responsibility for all adults who care for children. Kind and caring behavior appears early in life and continues to develop across the lifespan. Examples of caring behavior include:

- a toddler comforting a baby doll or sharing blocks with another child
- a preschooler bringing bandages to an injured classmate
- school-age children collecting canned goods for a

food bank
an adolescent volunteering to shovel snow for an elderly neighbor

You can help children show kindness toward others and experience the positive feelings that grow out of kind and caring behavior. Set a good example. Children are learning constantly from the words and actions of adults around them. The great humanitarian, Albert Schweitzer, suggests that adults teach children in three important ways:

The first is by example. The second is by example. The third is by example.

Even with your busy schedule, you can involve children in acts of kindness. By helping an elderly neighbor, taking a stray dog to a shelter or giving canned goods to a food bank, you can demonstrate your concern for others. You can reinforce kindness by explaining to children why you want them to engage in kind behavior. Research says that children are more likely to comply with adults' wishes when they hear a reasonable and understandable explanation such as, "Aunt Jean has been visiting with Grandma all week long at the hospital, so she is really tired. Would you please play quietly so that she can rest and relax?"

Expressing appreciation for kind and thoughtful behavior is another way to set a good example for children. These

actions help children to experience the positive feelings of being kind to others. By reinforcing children's kind behavior, you are helping them to understand that their kindness makes a positive difference. Examples might include, "Corrina, I'm really glad that you shared the blocks with Andy. See how much he likes playing with them!" Or, "Lamont, your after-school project sounds like a great idea! I'm sure that the nursing home residents will really enjoy hearing you play some songs on the piano."

Children need to know that the adults in their lives care about them and about others. Children who experience respect and appreciation from adults are more likely to demonstrate caring toward others and to recognize the positive impact of their kindness.

The following tips will help you contribute to the development of kind and caring children:

Set a good example by acting respectfully toward others.

Communicate the importance of helpfulness and generosity.

Use consistent rules and reasons for guiding children.

Talk with children about the feelings of others and the consequences of children's unkind behavior.

Express appreciation when children behave kindly toward others.

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Being a Successful Couple

Valentine's Day is coming. Are you planning some special way to tell your spouse how much you care? Ever wonder what it really takes to make a marriage lasting and happy? Do successful couples fight a lot or a little? Can they openly express emotions to one another? Do they keep shared goals alive?

Experts say that a critical element of a lasting relationship is realistic expectations about the ups and downs that couples are likely to experience over time. Even good marriages can have bad times. We may not feel we love our partner all the time - the other person may not always "be there" for us. But if we accept this reality, we can get through the rough times more smoothly. Family therapist Dr. Frank Pittman suggests that we'll do better if we understand that "Happiness, like sweat, is a by-product of activity. You can only achieve happiness if you are too busy living to notice whether you are happy or not."

What about fighting?

Some couples consider themselves successful because they never fight; others fight all the time and still have long-lasting, happy marriages. John Gottman, Ph.D. of the University of Washington says that this is not surprising because "not all stable couples resolve conflicts in the same way." In his book *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* he identifies three different but equally effective styles of

problem solving couples adopt: 1) they compromise calmly and work our problems, 2) conflicts erupt and disputes are frequent and loud, or 3) they agree to disagree and rarely confront problems head on.

According to Gottman, the key is balance. For example, if one partner gets angry, he or she tries to make it up to the other. However, Dr. Gottman has found that a stable relationship requires five times as much positive as negative feeling and interaction.

Things to watch out for:

Dr. Gottman describes four interactions that cause problems:

Criticism. Attacking someone's personality or character rather than a specific behavior. *To cope* - criticism escalates when people feel their complaints are being ignored. If you want someone to do something differently say so, and the avoid generalizations "you always" and "you never."

Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A

Q: February is National Heart Month. Are there any programs scheduled on reducing risk for heart disease?

A: "*The Hearts of Women*" will be held in Odessa on **March 9th**, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.. Marcia McCoy, R.N., Coordinator of the Women's Cardiac Center, St. Luke's Hospital, is the keynote speaker. Marcia was featured in the Sept. '99 issue of *American Health*. To register, call 1-800-323-7883. On **February 21st**, 12 to 1p.m., Golden Valley Hospital in Clinton is hosting "*Cooking to Your 'Heart's' Content*"-(cooking demo, heart information, and blood pressure checks) For info call 660-885-5511,ext.114.

Contempt.

The intent to hurt - common indications are insults, hostile humor, mockery. *To cope* - this happens

occasionally, but watch out if it becomes a way of life.

Approach your partner with calm complaints. Don't view arguments as a way to retaliate.

Defensiveness. When you deny responsibility, don't accept blame, or counter complaints with a complaint of your own you are escalating rather than resolving conflict. *To cope* - try to see the problem from your partner's point of view, show that you think his comments may have some validity.

Stonewalling. A stony silence when one partner tries to discuss problems that communicates smugness and disapproval. *To cope* - Explain to your partner how frustrating it is to be on the receiving end of this behavior. Take a "time out" until you can re-establish communication.

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Have You Scheduled Your Check-up?

Taking care of yourself sometimes requires professional help. But you have to take responsibility for making sure those periodic checkups are scheduled. Many health insurance programs cover

"wellness" exams for women, but may not make it obvious. Check it out. If you have limited health insurance coverage, contact your county health department who provide various health screenings.

High blood pressure and high cholesterol are referred to as the "silent killers". That is,

we don't realize we have a problem because there are no apparent "signs" to tell us. It's advisable to have your blood pressure checked at least every year or so, particularly women with a family history of heart disease. Blood cholesterol is generally measured every 5 years up to age 70.

Pap smears are recommended every three to five years from age 20 to 40. After age 40, the frequency is increased to every one or two years. Risk for cervical and ovarian cancer can be reduced through early detection, so pap smears are very important for all women. Even women who have had hysterectomies should continue to have pap smears.

Colorectal cancer screenings should be done after age 50. These include annual fecal occult blood tests, and sigmoidoscopy tests every 3 to 5 years. Breast cancer screening include monthly self-exams. Schedule annual mammograms after age 50, or after age 40 if your mother or a sister has had breast cancer. At age 40, a baseline mammogram is often recommended.

If diabetes runs in your family, inform your physician. There is no such thing as "border line" diabetic. You either are or aren't (like being pregnant!). With today's complex health care, we may change physicians often. Thus, it's essential for us to keep on top of our health records.