

*Heart disease number one cause of death for women*

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**Heart disease number one cause of death for women**

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Heart disease is the number one cause of death for women. It kills approximately 500,000 a year and black women are 69 percent more likely to suffer heart disease and attacks than white women.

According to Dr. Willarda V. Edwards, national director of health advocacy for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, black women have a 70 percent greater risk of dying of heart disease.

"The thinking has been that estrogen provided protection to women, that women didn't have to worry about heart disease until after age 50," said Edwards.

On Feb. 17, Gov. Haley Barbour signed a proclamation declaring 2004 as a year of awareness for women to know their risk for heart disease because it is the number one killer of women in Mississippi and the nation.

To help change this, health care organizations across the state have joined the Mississippi Heart Truth campaign for 2004. This awareness effort is part of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and partners with the organization's sponsorship of the national campaign called The Heart Truth. The goal is to give women a personal and urgent wake-up call about their risk of heart disease.

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In their report, 2000 Heart and Stroke Statistical Update, the American Heart Association indicates that cardiovascular disease "kills more women each year than the next 14 causes of death combined." The report noted the prevalence of high blood pressure among African Americans as a public health.

"High blood pressure is a concern because high blood pressure is a major risk factor in heart disease," states Craig Chancellor, acute care nurse practitioner at the Heart Care Clinic in Laurel. "Latino and African America women often feel they have limited access to health care because they often have lower socio-economic status."

Chancellor sites figures from the Center for Disease Control that show 19.2 percent of African American and 34.8 percent of Hispanic women have no health insurance coverage, which results in women in these groups waiting longer before seeing a medical professional.

"As a result, these women are sicker when they are seen," said Chancellor.

Another risk factor is obesity. The CDC records indicate that 40 percent of black women are obese and 30 percent of Hispanic in the 20-74 age group.

"The problem is that obesity contributes to other factors, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and inactivity," maintained Chancellor.

"Watching salt intake, moderate exercise, and monitoring cholesterol levels can assist women in controlling the risk factors."

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Women often do not experience any symptoms or the symptoms they experience differ from those of men. Chancellor explains that women may feel more fatigued when doing routine chores or may feel upper back pain as opposed to the classic "heaviness on the chest" described by men.

"Because women do not have the 'classic' symptoms, it is important that they have regular screenings or evaluations to detect acute problems," said Chancellor.

In an effort to increase public awareness of symptoms and encourage early evaluation and treatment, the Association of Black Cardiologists & National Physicians' Network have implemented "Keep the Beat."

NHLBI provides booklets designed to inform African Americans and Latinos about cardiovascular health. The booklets may be ordered online or by calling 301-592-8573.

To promote a heart-healthy lifestyle, the American Heart Association's Search Your Heart program, sponsored by Mazola, provides heart-healthy soul food recipes and cuisine tips including ways to reduce saturated fat and calories everyday on the American Heart Association Web site.