

Heart Disease -the Gender Gap

Hear disease has been the number one cause of death for both women and men in America. However, heart problems are still often under diagnosed and under treated in women. The overall prevalence of coronary artery disease is lower in women before menopause. Then they get jealous and they try to catch up to men. They do so in a matter of 15 to 20 years.

So by the time they reach age 65, their risk is almost equal to men. (JOULOUSY DOES NOT TAKE YOU ANYWHERE). The average age for first heart attack in men is about 65 years compared to 72 years in women. .

There are gender based gaps at every possible level, from women's awareness of symptoms to how they are treated in the emergency rooms and doctors offices Up until recently women are simply have not been well represented in clinical trials of heart related conditions. But the culture is slowly changing and some of the gaps are starting to close.

Recognition the problem. A 2019 survey by the American heart association found that only 44% of women correctly identified heart disease as their most common health threat compared with 65% in 2009. During a heart attack, chest discomfort often described as pressure, tightness or squeezing sensation is by far the most common symptom in both men and women.

Women are slightly more likely than men to have other symptoms, including nausea, fatigue, dizziness, and lightheadedness and shortness of breath. These unusual symptoms often delay the diagnosis and treatment of heart disease in women.

Treatment delay. Women tend to downplay their symptoms and delay seeking treatment. But healthcare providers may be contributing to this problem also. One 2022 study found that women who came to the emergency department with chest pain had to wait an average of 11 minutes longer to see a doctor compared to men who describe similar symptoms. This result in delay in the diagnosis and treatment.

Studies have shown that women are also less likely to be referred for diagnostic tests to check for coronary artery disease. Finally women who receive treatment, either medications or surgical procedures for this condition tend to have worse outcome than men

Unusual heart attacks-the female factor. Most heart attacks happen when a blood clot abstract a narrowed coronary artery, supplying the heart. However, there are several less common scenarios can also disrupt the coronary blood flow, causing similar symptoms. These are- 1.

Myocardial infarction with non-obstructive coronary arteries- This refers to heart attacks in which the major coronary arteries do not have significant narrowing.

There are several possible causes, among them are temporary spasm of the heart arteries called coronary artery spasm, blockage in a very tiny arteries called.MINOCA (Myocardial Infarction with Nonobstructive Coronary Arteries) which is five times more common in women. 2.

Spontaneous coronary artery dissection.(SCAD) which results from a tear in the inner wall of the coronary arteries which creates a flab or swelling. About 90% of people with this problem are women which may at times happen during pregnancy. 3.

Stress cardiomyopathy(broken heart syndrome) which typically occurs after severe emotional stress (Like sudden and unexpected death in the family)or physical stress, triggering a surge of hormones that alters the shape of the heart. More than 80% are women, but outcomes are worse in men.

Bottom line is that women should not ignore some of the unusual symptoms mentioned above and should seek prompt medical attention

Dr Keshava Aithal

ಅಂಕ 8 Double o