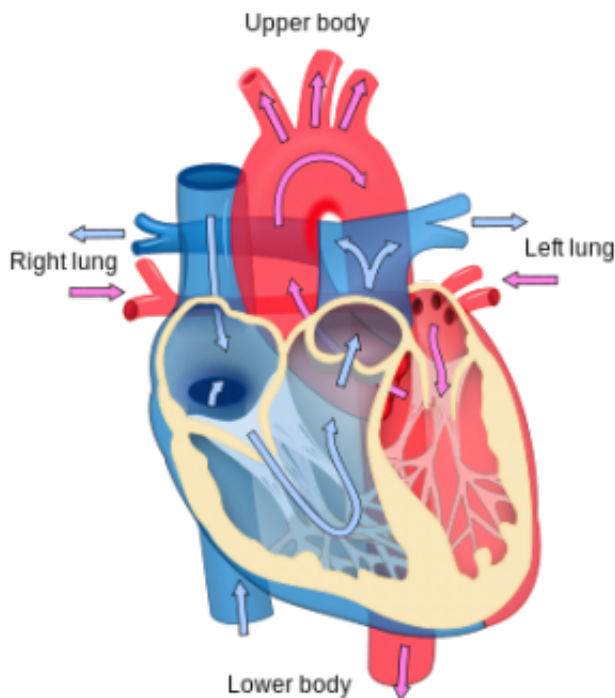


Women often ignore common precursor to heart attacks

February 13 2015, by Nora Dudley



Heart diagram. Credit: Wikipedia

As caretakers, women often don't stop and take time for themselves when it comes to matters of the heart. But with Valentine's Day around the corner, Loyola University Health System internal medicine physician Anita Varkey, MD, urges women to protect their health and prevent a common warning sign of heart disease.

Angina is characterized as pain or discomfort in the chest that results from plaque buildup in the arteries causing reduced blood flow to the [heart](#).

"With angina, the pain can be mild, so just because a woman doesn't feel like she is having a traditional [heart attack](#) doesn't mean that she should ignore chest discomfort," said Anita Varkey, MD, who also is an associate professor of [internal medicine](#) at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

Other symptoms of angina include chest pressure, discomfort in the jaw, neck or left arm, nausea, dizziness and shortness of breath. Symptoms typically result from physical exertion.

While age is a risk factor for angina that can't be controlled, there are steps women can take to prevent this condition.

1. Be proactive about your health. Don't delay seeing your doctor if you experience symptoms of angina. An American Heart Association study found that only 65 percent of women would call 911 if they experienced heart attack symptoms. However, 81 percent said they would call if they thought someone else was experiencing those same symptoms. Dr. Varkey suggests seeking medical attention if you have chest pain that lasts for 15 minutes or more and doesn't subside with an antacid.
2. Opt for fresh or frozen vegetables. This will help to reduce blood pressure by lowering sodium intake. If you must eat canned goods, make sure you rinse them first to remove some of the salt.
3. Avoid white foods. Eliminate added sugars and white rice, bread and pasta from your diet to control your blood sugar.
4. Try the Mediterranean diet for good cholesterol. Avoid red meat and dairy products, which contain saturated fats, and skip processed foods that contain trans-fats. Opt for the

Mediterranean diet, which has been found to help reduce [blood pressure](#), cholesterol and [blood sugar](#).

5. Maintain a healthy weight. An optimal weight will prevent the heart from having to work harder to pump blood throughout the body.
6. Spend more time in motion. The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of moderate exercise five days a week. If this seems overwhelming, break it into two, 15-minute increments five days a week.
7. Kick the habit the non-traditional way. If you have tried all traditional methods to quit smoking, opt for acupuncture or hypnosis.
8. Become more Zen. Stress can lead to inflammation, an underlying cause of heart disease. By keeping stress under control you also will be less likely to engage in harmful behaviors such as smoking, drinking to excess and eating unhealthy food.
9. Prioritize sleep and put off the to-do list until morning. Sleep tends to suffer when our lives are busy. But poor sleep habits also can lead to inflammation and [heart disease](#). Make it a priority to limit caffeine and other stimulants right before bed and get to sleep earlier each night.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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