

Heart disease still top killer of American women and men, symptoms differ

February 3 2016, by Cedric Ricks

Women tend to get palpitations, shortness of breath and "sharp" chest pain when suffering heart attacks, explains Stephanie Dunlap, DO, associate professor in the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and medical director of the UC Health Advanced Heart Failure Treatment Center.

Often men suffer "heavy-feeling [chest pain](#)" that radiates to the arm or jaw or shortness of breath, Dunlap adds.

Their symptoms may differ somewhat, but in the end [heart disease](#) hits men and [women](#) pretty hard. It's the No. 1 killer of both, claiming the lives of more than 600,000 people in the nation annually, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The risks of heart disease—which is more deadly than all forms of cancer combined—is still lesser known among American women. Since 1984, the annual cardiovascular disease mortality rate has remained greater for women than men; however, over the last decade, there have been marked reductions in cardiovascular mortality in women, explains Richard Becker, MD, director and physician-in-chief of the UC Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute.

"The dramatic decline in mortality rates for women is attributed partly to an increase in awareness, a greater focus on women and [cardiovascular disease risk](#) and the increased application of evidence-based treatment for established [coronary heart disease](#)," says Becker, also a UC Health

cardiologist.

Dunlap, also a member of the UC Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute, says that awareness of heart disease continues to improve with efforts such as the Go Red for Women Campaign sponsored by the American Heart Association.

The 13th annual National Wear Red Day is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 5, 2016.

"Heart disease affects women in the same way it affects men: women develop coronary disease, myocardial infarctions, heart failure, abnormal heart rhythms and valve problems," says Dunlap.

She offers a few suggestions on preventing or stopping heart disease in its tracks:

- Stop Smoking.
- Lose weight.
- Get moving with 30 minutes of exercise per day for most days of the week; the 30 minutes can be broken up into two 15-minute periods or three 10-minute periods.
- Get your blood pressure and cholesterol level checked regularly.
- E-cigarettes are more harmful than first thought. Stay away from them.
- Take your medication regularly if being treated for high cholesterol or high blood pressure.
- New medications have been approved for heart failure in the past year. Ask your doctor about what's new in treating [heart failure](#).

"Within the past month, the American Heart Association released its first scientific statement on heart attacks in women," says Becker. "Sex-specific differences exist in the underlying cause, symptoms and

outcomes, emphasizing that women do not have atypical features (compared to men), but rather have their own signature that must be recognized by the lay and medical communities."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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