

Physician discusses heart disease in women

February 25 2016, by Ziba Kashef



Heart disease has been the number-one killer of women for decades, but it is still an under-recognized problem. The Women's Heart and Vascular Program, directed by Yale School of Medicine's Dr. Lisa Freed, aims to change that by raising awareness and offering female patients a range of preventive and treatment services. Based in North Haven, Orange, and Guilford, the program is planning to expand to Greenwich this year. For heart month, YaleNews asked Freed about her work and the challenge of

heart disease; an edited version of the interview follows.

What do women still need to know about heart disease?

There has been an increased awareness that [cardiovascular disease](#) is the number-one killer of women in the United States and that more women than men die of heart disease every year, but this is still not widely recognized. Data most recently published by the American Heart Association (in 2012) tells us that only 56% of women surveyed knew that it was the leading cause of death for women. Among African-American and Hispanic women, the rate of [awareness](#) is only 36% and 34%, respectively.

How is heart disease different for women than men?

Women present later in life and with more co-morbidities—or other chronic diseases such as diabetes, renal disease, peripheral vascular disease, and cancers—than men. They also have a higher overall mortality and higher frequency of atypical symptoms.

What are signs that a woman might have heart disease?

For acute events like heart attack, chest pain is still the number-one symptom. Other symptoms that are less typical include shortness of breath; nausea; sweatiness; palpitations, pain in the neck, jaw, or back; and unusual fatigue.

What services does the Heart and Vascular Program provide? How is it different than standard care from a primary care provider or OB/GYN?

The Women's Heart and Vascular Program provides state-of-the-art cardiac care for women with heart disease, as well as preventive care for women with significant risk factors for heart disease, including hypertension, hyperlipidemia, glucose intolerance, and smoking.

How can women prevent heart disease?

Women can prevent heart disease by monitoring risk factors such as blood pressure, lipids, and blood sugar, as well as by living a healthy lifestyle with respect to diet and exercise. Also, women should avoid cigarette smoking.

How did you become interested in this area of medicine?

I find cardiology fascinating and fulfilling because we have so much that we can offer both in the preventive and treatment arenas. Women represent an underserved population in the area of heart disease, and I chose to focus on [women](#) and [heart disease](#) to be able to make a difference.

Provided by Yale University

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