Heart Disease And Minority Women

From The National Women's Health Information Center

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) ranks as America's No. 1 killer. Cardiovascular disease includes stroke, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, birth heart defects, hardening of the blood vessels, and other diseases of the circulatory system. One in three female adults have some form of cardiovascular disease. Women represent 52.8% of deaths from cardiovascular disease.

Heart disease is a group of diseases of the heart and the blood vessel system in the heart. Coronary heart disease, the most common type, affects the blood vessels of the heart. It can cause angina or a heart attack. Angina is a pain in the chest that happens when the heart does not get enough blood. It may feel like a pressing or squeezing pain, often in the chest, but sometimes in the shoulders, arms, neck, jaw, or back. Having angina means you're more likely to have a heart attack. A heart attack happens when a blood vessel is blocked for more than 20 minutes.

- **African-American women** have the highest death rate from heart disease of all American women. African-American women are 35% more likely than non-Hispanic white women to die from heart disease. The age-adjusted heart-disease death rate for African American women is 263.2 per 100,000 compared to the age-adjusted heart disease death rate of 193.7 per 100,000 for White women. In 2002, CVD, including stroke, caused the deaths of 56,721 black females. Forty-nine percent of black/African-American women have cardiovascular disease, according to 2004 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, lack of exercise, and smoking all put women at risk for heart disease. Studies have shown that African Americans don't get the same care for heart disease as whites because they don't get the same tests and treatments. African-American and Mexican-American women have higher CVD risk factors than white women of comparable socioeconomic status.

- **American Indian/Alaska Native** women have significantly lower death rates from heart disease (129.4 per 100,000) than do White women (210.4 per 100,000). Cardiovascular disease (CVD), including stroke, is the leading cause of death for American Indian/Alaska Native women. Diabetes is an extremely important risk factor for cardiovascular disease among American Indians. Heart disease has also become a major cause of disability and hospitalizations for American Indians/Alaska Natives. Among American Indians/Alaska Natives age 18 and older, 61.4% of women have one or more CVD risk factors — hypertension, current cigarette smoking, high blood cholesterol or obesity. Diabetes is an extremely important risk factor for cardiovascular disease among American Indians. Among American Indian or Alaska Natives only ages 18 and older, 55.5% of women report no physical activity. Geographic isolation, economic factors, and suspicion toward traditional spiritual beliefs are some of the reasons why health among AI/ANs is poorer than other groups. Other factors that contribute to poorer health outcomes for AI/ANs include cultural barriers, geographic isolation, inadequate sewage disposal, and economic factors.

- **Hispanic** women have lower death rates from heart disease (137.1 per 100,000) than do White women. Yet cardiovascular disease, including stroke, is the leading cause of death for Hispanic women. Thirty-four percent of Mexican-American women have cardiovascular disease. Hispanic women, especially those in certain subgroups, have significantly high rates of obesity, physical inactivity, elevated blood pressure, and high blood cholesterol. (Mexican American women are 1.3 times more likely than non-Hispanic white women to be obese.) In addition, 13.1% of Hispanic women smoke, which increases their risk of heart disease.

- **Asian American/Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian** women have much lower rates of heart disease than women of other minority groups. Yet, heart disease is still the second leading cause of death for this group. Heart disease risk and death rates are higher among Native Hawaiians and some Asian Americans (Asian Indians) partly because of higher rates of obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure. Diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, not exercising, and smoking all put women at risk for heart disease.

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