



Women's  
Healthy  
Heart  
Initiative

## Community Health Education Program

**Topic:** Women's Heart Health

**Date:** February 20<sup>th</sup> 2019

This video conference, hosted at Collective Community Services in Verdun presented by Wendy Wray, Director of the [Women's Healthy Heart Initiative](#) at the McGill University Health Centre

Women's heart health is often unseen, the work that the WHHI is trying to do is about raising awareness and sensitizing the population to the risks that heart disease poses to women. They would also like to raise awareness about symptoms and empower women to improve their heart health.

- 1 in 3 women die of heart disease and stroke
- Women often experience **more** symptoms when having a cardiac event
- Women's risk of heart disease increases by 50% in the presence of type 2 diabetes

### What is heart disease?

- The heart circulates blood, it pumps as a muscle
- **Angina** – when the heart isn't getting enough oxygen. It manifests as discomfort (not pain precisely, people describe it as a pressure, burning, indigestion, so we say discomfort instead of pain).
  - For women often discomfort in chest radiates to the back, but it can radiate to the arm too
- Angina will usually start when someone is exerting themselves (for example walking around, getting groceries, walking up stairs, etc)
  - If it is only **angina** and not a major cardiac event usually it will slow down once the activity stops. If it is more serious, it will not stop after someone stops an activity.

### How do we see it?

- Doctors may run a variety of tests to measure heart disease in patients, it is good to know a small overview of what they look like and how they work so that you can be informed:
  - **Cardiogram:** this test involves attaching a device to your chest that measures heart rate, this test is not invasive at all!
  - **Angiogram:** this is an x ray test that uses a special dye to take pictures of blood flow in the heart and the blood vessels around it. It is more invasive as it involves inserting a tube to lead to the heart to measure blood flow
  - **Stress test:** colloquially known as a treadmill test, this usually involves having a patient walk briskly on a treadmill while their heart rate is measured.
  - **Nuclear scan:** this test usually is 2 days long, it will show if there is an area of the heart that is not receiving enough oxygen.

### Women & Heart Disease

- Women lack awareness of their risk, they are under diagnosed, under treated, and under researched.
  - Traditionally research studies are done on men, historically medicine thought that men and women would react the same to cardiac events as women, but they are finding more and more that this is not the case.
- **Many women are unaware of their risk of heart disease.** Often heart disease is portrayed as a man's disease, even though it is the leading cause of death for women (heart disease and stroke are the cause of death for **1 in 3 women**).

### What are the risk factors?

- Because of a lack of awareness about the risk of heart disease in women in general, many women don't know what might increase their risk of heart disease.
  - Type 2 Diabetes increases the risk of heart disease in women by 50%.
  - Women who are smokers **who are taking oral contraceptives** are thirty times more likely to experience heart disease
  - A saying called "Time is muscle" in regards to heart disease – which is to say the more quickly you know that there is a problem the more quickly you can act to save muscle that is deteriorating.
  - If a woman was pregnant, and experienced preeclampsia or high blood pressure during pregnancy, she will be at risk for heart disease
  - High blood pressure in general is a risk factor for heart disease.
  - Women who experience menopause earlier are at higher risk for heart disease

### ***The good news about heart disease?***

It is a very “known” disease in the sense that we understand it and it is easy to predict and treat for the most part. We are still learning about how it affects women and how it manifests, but we understand a lot about it.

#### ***Non-modifiable Risk Factors***

These include age, genetics (what is your family history of heart disease), and whether or not you are male or female.

#### ***Modifiable Risk Factors***

These are risk factors that are partially determined by lifestyle, and they include: cholesterol (higher cholesterol means more build-up of plaque in the arteries), blood pressure (lower salt intake, more physical activity, weight loss if overweight, and lower alcohol consumption are all associated with lower blood pressure).

### **SYMPTOMS**

Some heart disease symptoms present the same in men and women, but women also have a longer list of symptoms that may indicate that a cardiac event is happening.

- Clamminess of the skin
- Sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Uncomfortable feeling in the chest – can be a pain, discomfort, tightness, pressure, heat, fullness.
  - Usually the pain radiates – often to the back or down the arms

Generally, during a cardiac event several (or all) of these symptoms are present at one time, which is important to note as these symptoms can be common (particularly for menopausal women).

Stroke symptoms come on more suddenly, they typically include weakness or numbness on one side of the body, confusion, trouble speaking or understanding, dizziness, loss of balance, or partial blindness.