
Focus on Health

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Heart Disease in Women

More women in the USA (510,000) now die of heart disease each year than men (440,000). Two decades ago, these numbers were 490,000 for women and 510,000 for men. Premenopausal women, whose hearts are protected by ovarian estradiol hardly ever have fatal heart attacks. They quickly become even more vulnerable after menopause than men. Smoking increases the risk of heart disease more dramatically for women than for men. The FDA warning that estrogen increases the risk of heart disease, heart attacks, and strokes should only apply to oral horse estrogen (Premarin), not to non-oral estradiol products (patches, gel, cream or pellets).

Breast Feeding and

Breast Cancer

Analysis of 47 epidemiologic studies performed in 30 countries made 2 points clear concerning breast feeding. Each birth had an independent effect of reducing the relative risk of developing breast cancer by 7%. Breast feeding offered additional protection that increased with the length of time that breast feeding occurred.

Estrogen and Bone Fractures

In a study done at the Mayo Clinic on 338 postmenopausal women who had undergone bilateral oophorectomy (removal of both ovaries) and were then followed for an average of 16 years, the risk of bone fractures was 50% higher than the expected community rate. Vertebral fractures occurred three times more often. Treatment with estrogen reduced the 50% increase to 30%. Prophylactic removal of ovaries in postmenopausal women is not indicated except in specific high risk situations.

Exercise Now!

There are three types of exercise with entirely different objectives. The first two are well known, the third type less so. First, there is aerobic exercise for cardiovascular conditioning and increased stamina. Examples are walking, jogging, and bicycling. Next, there is exercise to improve muscle strength and flexibility, such as weight training and stretching. Last but not least, there is post prandial exercise (after meals), for weight control. Five minutes is all that is necessary. Examples would be the Schwinn Air-Dyne, brisk walking, or stair climbing. This pushes ingested calories into muscle cells to be metabolized, rather than leaving them circulating in the blood stream for long periods of time. Post prandial exercise is especially important for that 20% of the American population who have insulin resistance, or adult onset (Type II) diabetes.

Spousal Disease

Your Risk

After adjusting for age, body mass index, and smoking status, the spouses of patients with asthma, depression, abnormal blood lipids, and peptic ulcer disease were at significantly higher risk for the same diseases. Those spouses of patients with diabetes, ischemic heart disease, and stroke had nonsignificantly higher odds ratios for those diseases.

As part of the professional services I feel should be provided by me to my patients, screening of the voluminous medical literature has become more and more important. Please read this now if you have time before I see you, so that we can further discuss whichever topic especially interests you.

Perhaps you have seen an item that I have not included in this list or have not seen myself. If so, feel free to bring it to my attention.

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