

Women Need Strong Healthy Heart Muscles, Too

With coronary heart disease being the single largest killer of American men and women, one in five deaths in the US is caused by a heart attack, which includes about 250,000 women each year. Almost all heart attack survivors die from a second attack or related failure, or suffer a greatly reduced quality of life. The risk for coronary heart disease was recently much lower for premenopausal females than for males in the same age range. After menopause, the risk for coronary heart disease increased significantly, but remains less than that for older men. Strong education efforts have currently decreased heart attack deaths in post-menopausal women from one in three to one in four, but overall coronary heart disease risk for females has not declined. Due almost entirely to obesity, there has been a substantial increase in risk for women under the age of 49. Estrogen keeps the arteries more flexible and less prone to blockage and plaque, but the benefits of estrogen have been exaggerated, as they lead females to believe that coronary heart disease is a man's disease. It's important to understand that 90 percent of female heart disease is because of risk factors that apply to everyone such as smoking, hypertension, high cholesterol/triglycerides, diabetes, abdominal obesity, inactivity, alcohol excess, low fruit/vegetable intake, and psychosocial issues. Sometimes women who suffer from a heart attack do not experience significant chest pain, leading the condition to be ignored or misdiagnosed, but lack of pain does not mean damage is not occurring. The following heart-specific foods and supplements can reduce your risk for coronary heart disease. L-Carnitine escorts fatty acids into the inner layer of the mitochondrial membrane, where they are oxidized. It is important in cardiac disorders because it protects the heart muscle from oxidative stress and low oxygen levels that are due to poor oxidation or partial arterial blockage. Patients with heart attack, angina, or congestive heart failure that are treated with L-carnitine have improved exercise tolerance with less pain, weakness, and shortness of breath. Low blood plasma levels of EPA and DHA are an indicator for increased risk of death from coronary heart disease. Those healthy pre- and post- menopausal women have higher levels of DHA and EPA in their blood fats than women who are the same age and have either coronary heart disease or diabetes. EPA and DHA can be found in fish and fish oil supplements, which have shown to reduce coronary heart disease risk factors within three months of supplementation. Coenzyme Q10 is important in mitochondrial respiration, which provides energy for all the muscular contractions and most cellular activities. Abnormally low levels of CoQ10 in heart tissue have been observed in those people with coronary heart disease. Doses of CoQ10 for treating heart conditions should be about 200 mg two or three times per day, while preventative doses are 60-150mg each day. Inflammation within the coronary arteries allows the formation of atherosclerotic plaque. Large plaques in the coronary arteries cause blockage of blood flow to the heart, or can become dislodged and impair circulation anywhere in the body. Inflammation also reduces arterial flexibility. Inflammation can be due to reactive nitrogen and oxygen compounds, but also can come from byproducts of metabolism, smoking, pollution, drugs, obesity, and inactivity. Plant foods counteract all sources of inflammation, with higher intakes of vitamin C, fruits, and vegetables being strongly linked to lower risk for coronary heart disease. Specific foods that are associated with the reduced risk include apples, chocolate, garlic, grapefruit, grapes, nuts, onions, oranges, pears, red wine, spirulina, strawberries, and wheat/oat bran. The inadequate intake of magnesium causes the heart to work harder which induces arrhythmia, increases LDL cholesterol and destabilizes blood sugar. Supplementation of magnesium is standard for those cardiac patients who are in critical condition or long term care, but you don't need to be a heart patient to benefit from its abilities. Eating healthier and taking supplements can help prevent heart attacks and reduce the risk of heart disease before its too late.

About the Author

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