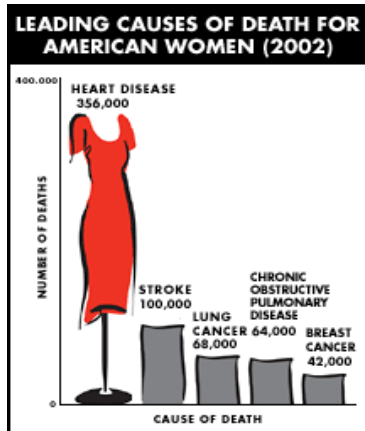


February 2006 WWURA Newsletter The Health Column by Evelyn E. Ames
Your Heart is Your Valentine! February is Heart Health Month!



Several members of the WWURA Board suggested an article of women and heart disease would be of interest to our members. Since February is National Heart Health Month, it's relevant to provide facts about women and heart disease and offer health promotion ideas to enhance heart health.

Coronary heart disease is the main form of heart disease. It is the leading cause of death for women in the United States. According to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, heart disease is a lifelong condition. Therefore, it is important for women, as well as for men, to practice several heart healthy behaviors once diagnosed with heart disease. By doing so, it lessens the potential for a person to have a second heart attack and/or to become disabled.

The NHLBI's campaign, *The Heart Truth*, suggests only 20 percent of women identify heart disease as the greatest health problem facing women today. Women fail to make the connection between risk factors, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, and their own chance of developing heart disease. The centerpiece of *The Heart Truth* is the Red Dress. The campaign's goal is to give women a personal and urgent wake-up call about their risk of heart disease. Go on line to: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth

Risk Factors for Heart Disease? Heart disease risk factors include: High blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, being overweight, being physically inactive, having a family history of early heart disease, and age (55 or older for women). After menopause, women are more apt to develop heart disease, in part because their body's production of estrogen drops. Women who have gone through early menopause, either naturally or because they have had a hysterectomy, are twice as likely to develop heart disease as women of the same age who have not yet gone through menopause.

Warning Signs! Heart attacks start slowly as mild pain or discomfort. The most common warning signs for men and women are:

- **Chest discomfort.** Discomfort in center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, may feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain. The discomfort can be mild or severe, and it may come and go.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body:** one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath.** May occur along with or without chest discomfort.
- **Nausea, light-headedness,** or breaking out in a **cold sweat.** Women are somewhat more likely than men to experience shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

Six Key Steps to Reduce Heart Attack Risk: (see www.nhlbi.nih.gov/actintime/rhar/rhar.htm)

NHLBI suggests taking six key steps to reduce risk of having a heart attack: stop smoking, lower high blood pressure, reduce high blood cholesterol, aim for a healthy weight, be physically active each day, and manage diabetes. For those who read the columns on stroke, note that these recommendations are the same for reducing risk. See "10 questions to ask your doctor" at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/index.htm or go to St. Joseph Hospital's site

(www.peacehealth.org/Whatcom/cardio/takeheart.htm) to learn about its Cardiovascular Center's heart screening to evaluate your risk.

Two web sites: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/lower/warning_signs.htm;
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/lower/hormone_therapy.htm