

The *Heart* Truth

*(Information provided by Grand Valley
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*B*roken Heart Syndrome -

We were going to continue discussing risk factors, but February is a good month to raise our awareness about any form of heart disease. Most women are still shocked to hear heart disease is the leading cause of death of American women. More than 200,000 women (one in four) die each year from heart attacks- five times as many women as breast cancer. And more women than men die of heart disease each year.

Experts on heart disease all agree: It is preventable.

One condition that women need to be aware of is “Broken Heart Syndrome.” This condition, also known as “stress cardiomyopathy,” is most common in post menopausal women and is triggered by a stressful event or profound grief. It can occur even in those without coronary artery disease or those without risk factors for heart disease.

The condition was given its name because it often occurs after the death of a loved one, fear, anger or surprises can trigger the phenomenon. When a stressful event occurs, the brain gets a message that signals the adrenal glands (the glands on the kidneys that regulate stress) to release hormones (epinephrine, norepinephrine and dopamine) that rushes to the heart. These hormones cause rapid and severe heart muscle weakness and lead to heart failure. The symptoms often mimic heart attack symptoms and usually are sudden. There can be chest pain, extreme fatigue, shortness of breath, sweating and fainting. Often, it is misdiagnosed as a heart attack. The good news is that this usually is temporary and, most have complete resolution of the weakness in the heart several weeks after the event. There can be complications, but with treatment and diagnosis, the condition has a good prognosis. Reoccurrence is rare; it has been reported in no more than 10% of the cases. The

factor that contributes to a good prognosis is early recognition and prompt treatment by emergency personnel.

Although “Broken Heart Syndrome” can affect those without known heart disease, it still is a good reminder to minimize our risk factors for heart-related illnesses and disease.

It is not uncommon for women with heart disease to have normal coronary arteries. Women tend to have more disease in their small vessels. Although the risk factors for heart disease are the same for men and women, women are more sensitive and are at a greater risk for poor outcomes. Women can minimize their risk by avoiding smoking, maintaining a normal BMI (Body Mass Index between 18 and 29), keeping triglycerides less than 150, staying active, keeping track of blood pressure and avoiding stress. Maintaining annual physicals, knowing your numbers and discussing healthy strategies with your doctor will help to prevent heart disease or a “broken heart.” Take the time to become informed about heart disease. It could save your life.

Next month we really WILL continue with “risk factors.”

Next month, more about risk factors.

My Heart – GFWC Michigan wants you to

“LOVE your heart!”