

Trends of Women and Heart Disease in Florida

THE NUMBER OF WOMEN WHO DIE OF HEART DISEASE CONTINUES TO INCREASE IN FLORIDA AS THE STATE'S POPULATION INCREASES. Each year approximately 13,000 women die of heart disease in Florida. However, there are several behaviors that when modified can prevent heart disease. Modifiable risk factors for coronary heart disease include cigarette smoking and exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, poor nutrition, overweight and obesity, and physical inactivity. High blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, obesity and diabetes are conditions that confer substantial excess risk for coronary heart disease and are largely preventable by maintaining healthful nutrition behaviors and regular physical activity. Thus, preventing and reducing cigarette use and establishing and maintaining healthful nutrition and regular physical activity are key to preventing coronary heart disease among women and men. Women are equally likely to have these risk factors for heart disease as men.

Once adverse health conditions like high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, overweight and obesity, or diabetes are established, adequate management of these conditions are essential to preventing and delaying the poor health outcomes, such as coronary heart disease, that often result. The prevalence of these risk conditions has remained fairly stable over time for Florida women and men, with the exception of obesity—the prevalence of which has nearly doubled in the past decade. Nationally, educational efforts have been implemented to promote improved management of high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. Life style changes, such as making healthful nutrition choices and engaging in regular physical activity, often enhance the health status of persons with these conditions, and may delay the onset of chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease.

Improvements in the treatment of coronary heart disease have contributed to the substantial reductions in coronary heart disease mortality experienced by both women and men. However, recent research suggests that women and men may not be benefiting equally from these advances. While women who experience a first myocardial infarction tend to be older and more likely than men to have other adverse conditions (like diabetes and high blood pressure), even after adjusting for these factors, women have been shown to have a greater risk of death following the first heart attack than men. Women, who have coronary heart disease, may also experience poorer outcomes relative to men.

