



FOCUS ON

Your Heart

BY LARRY WIDEN

Prevention, Detection Ward Off Heart Attacks



Richard Staudacher, M.D.

Heart disease. It's always been considered a man's health problem just as breast cancer is traditionally a woman's issue. However, in the last 20 years, incidence of heart disease in

women has overtaken men. In fact, women are more likely to die of cardiac problems than breast cancer, says Richard Staudacher, M.D., a cardiologist who works primarily at Waukesha Memorial Hospital.

"In the past, women's heart problems often went unnoticed because their symptoms are different than those in men," Staudacher says. "Rather than chest pains or angina, women often have shortness of breath or nausea. Because women typically have a higher tolerance for pain than men, the medical profession tended to misdiagnose the symptoms."

Staudacher says physicians began paying closer attention to women's heart disease in the early 1980s. Studies showed that while premenopausal women benefited from protective estrogen, women in menopause had heart disease just like men.

One major reason for heart disease in both men and women is the poor ratio of physical activity versus caloric intake. "By increasing the amount of time we spend in front of computers or driving in a car, we've evolved into a very sedentary culture," says



Debbie Ketterhagen, M.S., R.N. advanced practice nurse with ProHealth Care's Women's Heart Advantage program reviews cardiac risk factors with a woman who participated in the program.

Staudacher. "Coupled with the Western diet of fast food and sugary snacks, inactivity has caused the percentage of obese people in this country to rise substantially."

Staudacher says weight control and exercise are paramount to staying heart healthy, but he also cites smoking and excess stress as culprits in the overall picture.

Last year 500,000 women experienced heart attacks, and almost half of them died as a result. Staudacher says the key is prevention and early detection. Computerized tomography (or CT) scanning enables car-

diologists to diagnose arterial plaque and other problems much earlier. "The cardiac stress tests have been around for about 40 years, and they were the best we had at one time," Staudacher says. "However, we're discovering that patients can pass the stress test and still have heart disease. The CT technology reveals potential problems to us much sooner."

Staudacher is confident these CT tests will be a routine part of all cardiac check-ups in the years to come. "This is the new wave of medical technology, and it's only going to get better." ♥