

HEALTH MATTERS

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Deciphering Heart Disease Symptoms: Unveiling Gender Differences for Timely Intervention

Hearth disease is a leading cause of death worldwide, claiming millions of lives each year. Amidst the staggering statistics, a crucial aspect often overlooked is the stark contrast in how heart attack symptoms manifest between men and women. As we commemorate American Heart Month, it's important to shed light on these differences, emphasizing the significance of early detection and interventions for optimal heart health.

Traditionally, heart attack symptoms have been portrayed through a male-centric lens, characterized by the classic chest pain and discomfort. However, research and clinical observations have revealed that women often experience subtler, less recognizable

symptoms, leading to underdiagnosis and delayed treatment.

Dr. Michael Sorrentino of NYU Langone East End Cardiology helps us understand this important topic. He explains, "Women do not always experience typical heart attack symptoms like chest pain and may instead present with nausea, shortness of breath, or symptoms resembling acid reflux. While heart disease has been viewed as more common in men, the rates are fairly equal between men and women after a certain age."

Societal and cultural norms can also be a factor in the detection of heart disease. Dr. Sorrentino explains, "Because we see such extreme

symptoms of heart attacks in television and movies, women may feel that their symptoms are not severe enough to tell a doctor." He also reminds us that it's not only gender where we see these differences occur. "When we hear about the so-called typical symptoms of heart disease, it's largely white males who experience them," he says. "Women, people of color, people with diabetes – they all present atypical symptoms, even though they are in the majority. Unfortunately, this means that many individuals may not be speaking with their doctor and getting the proper diagnosis and care they need."

When assessing symptoms, Dr. Sorrentino advised considering any exertional components like discomfort occurring during or after physical activity as an important red flag, regardless of gender. "If a female patient told me she became nauseated after going for a walk around the block, that would be a concern."

Recognizing these symptoms can be critical for timely intervention and improved outcomes. Dr. Sorrentino shares, "Early detection of blockages or discovery of high-risk factors for heart disease means that we can work together to prevent heart attacks, not treat heart attacks that have already happened. With early detection, patients can utilize the proper medication and make

lifestyle changes to prevent blockages from worsening."

Dr. Sorrentino stresses the need for heightened awareness among the general public, urging individuals to speak with their doctor and seek prompt medical evaluation, especially if experiencing unusual symptoms. He also emphasizes the importance of regular exercise, thirty minutes a day and five times a week, and a low-cholesterol, low-salt, Mediterranean-inspired diet.

During American Heart Month and beyond, understanding heart disease symptoms and the importance of early detection is paramount. By embracing tailored approaches to prevention and management and continuing to raise awareness, we can collectively strive towards a future without heart disease.

Dr. Michael Sorrentino holds office hours in the Center for Well-Being at Peconic Landing, a life plan community in Greenport. Schedule an appointment by calling (631) 477-2701 or learn more about the Center for Well-Being at peconiclanding.org/well-being.