

Like clockwork

from Dr. Laura Corio, M.D.

Women's Health Issues

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Women Are Not Men

Much of the medical research you see reported on the evening news and in the rest of media quotes the findings of studies that largely involve men. What is not always clear is how these results apply to women. You can't make an assumption that women are simply a smaller version of men and therefore will have the same symptoms when they are sick or react to medications in exactly the same way as men do. Here are three examples of health conditions that are different for women.

Heart Disease

We've all seen the classic scene of a heart attack in movies or on TV: An older man suddenly clutches his chest and falls to the floor. While a bit over dramatic, chest pain is a typical symptom of a heart attack for men – but not necessarily for women. Surprisingly, a National Institutes of Health survey found that fewer than 30 percent of women report having chest discomfort prior to their heart attack and 43 percent report have no chest pain during any phase of the attack. Women tend to have heart issues later in life when they no longer enjoy the cardio protection of estrogen. When they experience symptoms such as unusual fatigue or weakness, sleep disturbance, shortness of breath, indigestion or anxiety, they often chalk them up to age rather than a cardiac event. To complicate matters, the timing of symptoms isn't as predictable as it is in men; they may linger for several months before an episode or immediately proceeding. If you're past menopause and experience any of the aforementioned symptoms for more than a few days, don't hesitate to check in with your cardiologist. (For more information on symptoms specific to women, go to http://www.acog.org/from_home/publications/press_releases/nr02-20-07.cfm.)

Urinary Tract Infections

Fifty to sixty percent of all women will experience at least one urinary tract (UT) infection during their lifetime whereas very few men have the pleasure. The urinary tract is usually germ-free but can become contaminated during intercourse or after you go to the bathroom. Because a woman's urethra is quite short, it's a quick ride for bacteria into the bladder where they multiply and cause infection; if they migrate up even further, this can lead to a kidney infection. The primary symptoms of a bladder infection include burning and pain with urination as well as frequency and urgency issues. Sometimes you'll also include an incomplete emptying of the bladder, visible blood in the urine or brown or cloudy urine. Additionally, there may be painful bladder spasms, pain in the lower abdomen or a low back ache. Kidney infections cause the same problems accompanied by chills and fever, mid-back pain, nausea and sometimes vomiting. UT infections are preventable and treatable; if you think you have one, pick up the phone and call me! Left untreated, infections worsen and lead to chronic problems.

Autoimmune Diseases

Autoimmune disease refers to a varied group of illnesses that involve almost every human organ system such as multiple sclerosis, Grave's disease and rheumatoid arthritis. They strike women at a rate three times higher than men and some diseases in this category strike at an even higher rate. In all autoimmunity conditions, the underlying problem is similar: The body's immune system becomes misdirected and attacks the very organs it was designed to protect. The fact that women have enhanced immune systems compared to men increases women's resistance to many types of infection, but also makes them more susceptible to autoimmune diseases especially during childbearing years where doctors are less likely to link health issues with autoimmunity. Often symptoms go untested and untreated for a long time before they're finally diagnosed. If you've had chronic complaints that have gone on for a period of time with no clear medical reason, let's talk. I can refer you to a specialist for testing.



Women and Heart Disease

Fewer than 30 percent of women report having any chest discomfort prior to their heart attack.



Dr. Corio's Resources

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PEARLS

The Question: Should I take a daily aspirin to prevent heart attacks?

Dr. Corio Says: Studies prove that a daily dose of aspirin protects against heart attacks. In men. For women, the results are less clear. The Nurses' Health Study, a 30-year-long study of nearly 80,000 women, found that women who took low doses of aspirin were 25 percent less likely to die of any cause but women who took higher doses were 43 percent more likely to die from hemorrhagic stroke compared with those who never took aspirin. Any benefits to taking aspirin didn't kick in until about five years of use and cancer-preventing benefits didn't occur until after a decade of use. This, as well as the findings from other large studies, suggests that the benefit from popping a daily aspirin for women is inconclusive and may carry risks. No woman should start aspirin therapy without discussing it with her doctors first. A good place to start is at your next appointment with me.

The Question: Is the risk of serious illness increasing for women?

Dr. Corio Says: Long days, high stress and late diners used to be for the "men's only" club. So were gout, high blood pressure and hair loss. Women are becoming more prone to these so-called "men's diseases" because many are now living the fast paced, stressed out lifestyles that until recent history, only men lived. Unfortunately the effects are often more problematic for women. Unique biology and smaller size along with greater longevity and a propensity to ignore health problems means these health issues are likely to increase in women. A recent Danish study showed that women in high-pressure jobs are twice as likely to suffer from heart disease as their male counterparts; drinking alcohol has been strongly associated with an increased risk of breast cancer; and more women (especially older women) suffer from gout than men. While many of us don't have the luxury of slowing down, that shouldn't excuse anyone from eating right, exercising on a regular basis and making an attempt to deal with stress. Of course, regular health checkups are a must, starting with your annual checkup here!

Sources: WebMD, Uptodate.com

Doctor & Office Hours

Doctor's Hours

Monday	12:00 PM-6:00 PM
Tuesday	9:00 AM-3:00 PM
Wednesday	9:30 AM-2:30 PM
Thursday	8:00 AM-2:00 PM

Office Hours

Monday	10:00 AM-5:00 PM
Tuesday – Friday	9:00 AM-4:00 PM

Make an Appointment

Call 646-422-0730 during our normal office hours.



News Flash

A landmark UCLA study suggests that women respond to stress with a cascade of brain chemicals that cause us to make and maintain friendships with other women. It's a stunning find that has turned five decades of stress research---most of it on men--- on its ear. Until this study was published, scientists generally believed that when people experience stress, they trigger a hormonal response that revs the body to either stand and fight or flee as fast as possible. However, when the hormone oxytocin is released in a woman, it buffers her fight-or-flight response and encourages her to tend children and gather with other women instead. When she actually engages in this tending or befriending, more oxytocin is released producing an even greater calming effect. This mellowed response does not occur in men because their overriding sex hormone testosterone seems to dampen the effects of oxytocin.