

Heart Disease and Stroke in Women

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC - safer, healthier people.

[Kathy Maddox] Welcome to the CDC women's health podcast about heart disease and stroke prevention. I'm your host, Kathy Maddox. Heart disease and stroke are the first and third leading causes of death for women and men in the United States. Judy Hannan, with CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention, is joining me today to talk about this important issue. Welcome, Judy.

[Judy Hannan] Thank you, Kathy.

[Kathy Maddox] Judy, how does heart disease and stroke impact women in the United States?

[Judy Hannan] Well heart disease accounts for one in four deaths in women, and as far as stroke, more than twice as many women as men between 45 and 54 years of age report having had a stroke. Although these statistics may be alarming, the good news is that heart disease and stroke are largely preventable.

[Kathy Maddox] How can we lower our risk for heart disease and stroke?

[Judy Hannan] Well steps to lower your risk include things we've all heard, eating right, getting at least two-and-a-half hours of physical activity each week, and not smoking. As far as eating right, it's important to eat *more* fruits and vegetables and *less* sodium. In general, the more sodium you consume, the higher your blood pressure, and having high blood pressure increases your risk for heart disease and stroke.

[Kathy Maddox] How much sodium *should* we consume?

[Judy Hannan] A diet high in sodium can raise your blood pressure. The standard recommendation and what you see on food labels, is less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day- that's about a teaspoon of salt. However, people over 40, African Americans, and those with high blood pressure, should consume no more than about 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day- about two-thirds of a teaspoon of salt. Unfortunately, Americans consume more than *double* their recommended limit of sodium.

[Kathy Maddox] Where is all of this sodium coming from, how can we lower the amount we take in each day?

[Judy Hannan] It may be surprising to learn that most of the sodium we consume comes from processed and restaurant foods, not from our salt shakers. It's really important to read food labels, choose foods that are lower in sodium, and eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.

[Kathy Maddox] Is there anything else we can do to lower our risk for heart disease and stroke?

[Judy Hannan] Well, in addition to eating right, not smoking, and exercising, you also should be checked regularly for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, as well as high blood sugar, which can be a sign of diabetes. And follow your health care provider's advice to control all of these conditions.

[Kathy Maddox] What can the nation, as a whole, do to lower the burden of heart disease and stroke in the United States?

[Judy Hannan] There are three things at a national level that can be done:

One. We really need to reduce the sodium content in processed and restaurant foods and provide better access to fresh fruits and vegetables in our neighborhoods.

Two. We need to develop more facilities that promote recreation, bicycling, and walking to encourage physical activity.

And three. We need to make sure that people have access to screenings and medications for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

All of these policies can help prevent or delay heart disease and stroke in women *and* in men.

[Kathy Maddox] Thank you, Judy, for explaining the importance of diet, exercise, screenings, and policy in lowering our risk for heart disease and stroke. For more information on heart disease and stroke, please visit www.cdc.gov/dhdsp. For more information on women's health, visit www.cdc.gov/women. For CDC, I'm Kathy Maddox.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.