



March is Women's Health Awareness Month

Diseases and Health Challenges Common to Women

Some health issues that are common to both men and women affect women differently. Although the symptoms may be similar, the effects of the condition and the care necessary can differ significantly for women. In addition, some of these conditions might affect women primarily more severely than men. For example, Women are at a higher risk for breast cancer than men.

Women experience unique health care challenges and are more likely to be diagnosed with certain diseases than men.

Chronic diseases and conditions such as **cancer, heart disease, and diabetes** are the leading cause of death for women. Thirty-eight percent of women suffer from one or more chronic diseases, compared to 30% of men. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

CANCER

Cancers that primarily affect women: Breast, Ovarian, Endometrial, cervical, Vaginal, Uterine

The human body is made up of billions of cells that grow and divide over a person's lifetime. As cells age, they die and are replaced by new ones. Cancer starts when something goes wrong in the process and the old or abnormal cells do not die when they should. Instead, they continue to grow at a rapid rate. They grow out of control and can crowd out normal cells and make it difficult to perform the normal bodily functions.

There are many different types of cancers and they can develop anywhere in the body. Cancer can also spread (metastasis) to other parts of the body.

There are two main types of cancers:

Hematologic (blood) cancers:

These are cancers of the blood cells, and include the leukemias, lymphomas and Multiple Myeloma.

Solid Tumors:

These are cancers that affect any other body organ or tissues. Among the most common are breast, lung, colorectal, prostate, and skin.

An awareness of prevention and early detection, especially for cancers that are preventable is key. Increasing awareness of mammography, HPV vaccine for adolescent girls to prevent cervical cancer, Yearly woman's exam, smoking cessation, maintaining a healthy weight and diet.

Symptoms/warning signs of cancer

- Change in bowel /bladder habits
- A sore that does not heal
- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- Thickening or lump in breast or elsewhere
- Indigestion or difficulty swallowing
- Change in shape, size, or color in wart or mole
- Nagging cough or hoarseness

There are cancer screening tests recommended by the American Cancer Society

HEART DISEASE

Women may have more subtle symptoms of a heart attack than men, such as upper abdominal pain, dizziness or fatigue, chest pain on the right side, neck, jaw, shoulder and upper back pain, shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, sweating, indigestion, unusual fatigue.

These symptoms can be vague and not as noticeable as the crushing chest pain often associated with heart attacks. This might be because women tend to have blockages not only in the main arteries, but also in the smaller ones that supply blood to the heart. Heart disease risk for women include diabetes, mental stress/depression, smoking, inactivity, menopause, pregnancy complications, family history of early heart disease, inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus.

Ways to reduce risk of heart Disease

Quit smoking, regular exercise, healthy weight, healthy diet, manage stress, limit alcohol, manage other health conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and high cholesterol.

Stroke

Also known as Cerebrovascular Accident (CVA).

Although many of the risk factors for stroke are the same for men and women; family history of stroke, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol, some of the risk factors are unique to women. These include:

Taking birth control pills, being pregnant, use of hormone replacement therapy to relieve menopausal symptoms, having frequent migraine headaches, having a waistline larger than 35.2 inches particularly if post- menopausal and have high triglyceride (Blood fat) levels.

DIABETES

Diabetes is a group of diseases that affect how your body uses blood sugar (glucose). Glucose is vital to health because it is an important source of energy for the cells that make up the body tissues. It is also the main source of fuel for the brain.

There are two types of diabetes, Type 1 and type 2. The underlying cause varies by the type of diabetes, but no matter the type, it can lead to glucose in the blood, which can lead to serious health problems.

Type 1 diabetes can develop at any age, although it often appears during childhood or adolescence.

Type 2 diabetes is the more common type and can develop at any age, though it is more common in people over 40.

Potentially reversible diabetes

Prediabetes occurs when the blood sugar level is higher than normal but not high enough to be classified as diabetes.

Gestational diabetes occurs during pregnancy but may resolve after the baby is born.

Diabetes can lead to serious and costly complications such as heart disease, strokes, kidney disease, amputations, and blindness.

Common Signs and symptoms of Diabetes:

- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Extreme hunger
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Irritability
- Presence of ketones in the urine

OTHER HEALTH CONCERNS

Osteoporosis and Bone Health

Osteoporosis is a bone disease that occurs when the body loses too much bone, makes too little bone or both. As a result, the bones become so weak and brittle that a fall in serious situations, or even a mild stress like coughing, sneezing, bending over or a mild bump can cause a fracture. Osteoporosis most commonly occurs in the spine, hip or wrist, but bones in other areas can break

too. When osteoporosis affects the vertebrae (bones in the spine) it often leads to a stooped or hunched posture.

Usually one does not feel the bones weakening, breaking a bone is often the first sign of osteoporosis, or a person may notice that they are losing height, or their upper back is curving.

According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, the disease affects approximately 8 million women over age 50. It is responsible for about 2 million hip and other fractures annually. Additionally, twenty percent of seniors who break a hip die within one year from either the complications related to the broken bone itself or the surgery to repair it. Many people long term nursing home care.

Obesity

Obesity is when a person's Body Mass Index ($BMI = \text{Kg}/\text{m}^2$) (weight in kg and height in m^2) A BMI of 25 or > is considered overweight and a BMI of 30 or > is considered obese (use one of the several BMI calculators on the internet to find your BMI).

Obesity negatively impacts the health of women in many ways. Being overweight the risk of diabetes, coronary artery disease in women, overweight women have a higher risk of low back pain and knee osteoarthritis. It negatively impacts contraception and fertility. There seems to be an association between obesity and depression.

The prevalence of obesity is rising. According to the WHO, more than 1 billion people are overweight, with another 300 million meeting the criteria for obesity.

Drug/Alcohol Abuse

The health effects of alcohol and drug abuse are more serious in women than in men. These health effects include increased risk for breast cancer, heart disease and fetal alcohol syndrome in which infants born to mothers who abuse drug and alcohol during pregnancy suffer brain damage and learning disabilities.

Depression

According to studies from the Mayo Clinic, women are twice as likely as men to experience depression. About one in five women will experience the condition at some point in their lives, commonly between ages 40 and 59, and may be later for some women, depending on changes that occur in their lives such as loss, grief and loneliness.

Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease disproportionately affects women. Two-thirds of adults age 65 and older with the disease are women. 60 percent of the nearly 15 million people who provide unpaid care to a person with Alzheimer's are women. The disease also places a financial burden on families, who typically cover a majority of the estimated \$56,800 average cost per year to care for a person with Alzheimer's. The following is according to the Alzheimer's Association Shriver Report.....

The number of people with Alzheimer's is expected to triple by 2050. In response to this, some states have adopted Alzheimer's plans that include ways to improve early detection, coordinate health care services, set training requirements for health professionals and support people caring for their relatives.

Violence Against Women (affecting women's overall health)

One of the most common forms of violence is intimate partner violence and this is experienced by women all over the world. It goes across all ages, all geographical locations, and all socio-economic levels. This kind of violence can range from sexual, physical, mental, verbal, financial abuse up to and including murder. Violence against women can cause long term physical and

mental health problems, not just to the women involved, but also to children, families, and communities. Harm to communities can include lost work and homelessness.

Call 911 or the hotline for help. If you can leave go to the nearest shelter to seek help.

I hope this month's educational information provided to you by the Social Justice Ministry team at the Episcopal Church of All Saints and Ascension has been informative. April is Organ and tissue Donation Month. Please stay tuned.

Sylvia Thomas

References:

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womenshealth.gov

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National osteoporosis Foundation

<http://www.cdc.gov/wisewoman/>

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/health-and-conditions.aspx>

www.cancer.org

[American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cancer](http://www.cancer.org)