



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women Can Take Heart In Fight Against Heart Disease

(NAPSA)—Although cancer is believed to be the leading health threat among women, heart disease affects more women than all cancers combined and claims nearly 500,000 lives each year. But women, take heart: Many experts believe this toll can be lowered if women assume a more active role in battling the disease. That's the idea behind a new nationwide campaign called Take Heart, which seeks to motivate women to take care of themselves, take charge of their health, and better understand what puts them at risk and how they can change their behavior to fight heart disease.

"Our best hope for bringing these numbers down is to make sure every woman learns about her risk of heart disease and does everything possible to reduce it," says Noel Bairey Merz, MD, director of the Preventive and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. "We need to go beyond diet and exercise changes, because for most women, it may not be enough."

One risk factor most women try to manage with diet and exercise is high cholesterol. However, the body produces 80 percent of cholesterol and only the remaining 20 percent may be a result of diet.

Created by a multidisciplinary panel of experts, Take Heart addresses the physical, medical,

and psychological components of heart health, providing tools for women to change their attitudes as well as their behavior.

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Putting yourself first

"We're trying to shift women's thinking so they take care of themselves and make their well-being a higher priority," says Dr. Merz. Women are the gatekeepers and decision makers for their families' health and juggle many other activities, "but all too often they forget their own needs."

Learning about physical factors

Exercise and a balanced diet are important, but there's a lot more that women can do to reduce their risk—for example, learning about the risk factors associated with heart disease, becoming familiar with the warning signs of heart disease, and looking into treatments and lifestyle changes.

Taking action

"Once they have identified the risk factors that affect them, such

as high cholesterol and high blood pressure, women need to take this information to heart and work with their health care providers to reduce as many of these as they can," says Dr. Merz.

The Take Heart campaign is part of the Women's HeartAdvantage program, a national initiative that aims to change women's behavior with regard to heart disease, and is supported through an educational grant from AstraZeneca, makers of Crestor®. Women's HeartAdvantage and Take Heart are initiatives of VHA Inc., the largest cooperative of not-for-profit hospitals in the U.S., comprising 2,200 health care organizations.

Throughout 2004, participating Women's HeartAdvantage hospitals will host Take Heart health events, where women will be able to obtain the latest information on heart disease, learn how they can decrease their risks, and participate in on-site health screenings. Educational workshops and health risk assessments also may be offered.

Women can learn more about the Take Heart campaign and upcoming health events at www.womensheartadvantage.org. The site also offers information about assessing and reducing heart disease risks, and about treating and living with heart disease.