



Society for  
Vascular Surgery

Gender Differences in Vascular Disease Require Personalized Approach in Care

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ROSEMONT, Ill., March 9, 2020 – Women’s heart health takes center stage as American Heart Month ends and National Women’s History Month and International Women’s Day are observed. The Society for Vascular Surgery shares the latest news on what women — and the people who love them — should know. Vascular surgeons are specialists who treat conditions of the vascular system, which impact heart health.

**Women and Heart and Vascular Disease.** Though heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death for women over the age of 25 in the United States, only one in three women identify cardiovascular disease as their greatest health threat, according to a recently published article from the Cleveland Clinic. Although the death rate from heart diseases has decreased among men, it continues to increase in women. "Heart disease" is an all-encompassing phrase referring to a number of health issues, including vascular conditions. Risk factors that affect women sometimes more than men can include diabetes, stress and depression, smoking, a lack of exercise and a family history of early heart disease. Symptoms of cardiovascular disease also tend to occur about 10 years later in women than in men, which many women do not realize.

"It is important for vascular health experts to recognize that the progression of women's vascular function is different than men's vascular function. Therefore, evaluation and care need to be personalized," said Kathleen Ozsvath, MD, chief of surgery Samaritan Hospital, Troy, New York; vascular associates, St Peters Health Partners; professor of surgery, Albany Medical Center. "It is also important for women to understand heart disease is preventable, and women as well as men can take steps to reduce the risk for heart disease. This includes: quitting smoking or not starting smoking, maintaining a healthy diet and weight, exercising, managing stress and ensuring they treat current conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure."

**Vascular and Heart Conditions.** Heart disease is also called cardiovascular disease. It includes a variety of heart and blood vessel conditions, such as coronary artery disease, peripheral arterial disease, heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, heart valve disease, vascular disease, aorta disease, heart failure, and other heart and blood vessel conditions. The vascular system, allows blood to circulate and transport essential components through the body to keep the body running and aids in fighting heart disease.

**Aging Blood Vessels.** A new study suggests women's blood vessels may age faster than men's.

Women's vascular system ages in different ways than men's, and women experience differences over time in the rate at which the hardening of artery walls, or atherosclerosis, develops. This build-up of cholesterol and plaque on the inner walls of the arteries that then restricts blood flow to the heart is the most common cause of heart disease.

**Risk Factor Modification.** Another new study out this year demonstrated that understanding women's vascular health issues based on risk factors can impact their chance for heart disease. Researchers from Mayo Clinic noted women have gender-specific risk factors for damage to endothelial cells, crucial to vascular function. Additionally, lower estrogen levels, premature menopause, pre-eclampsia and hypertension, among other aging factors, impact a woman's vascular health differently and may increase risk of heart disease. Focusing on risk factor modification proactively can help in maintaining optimal vascular health.

"Generating awareness of heart disease and its risk factors during specific health months is important; however, attention to the issue should not stop there," said Dr. Ozsvath. "The key takeaway for both women and men is that sex- and age-related differences have a direct bearing on an individual's risk factors for heart disease and the potential for vascular conditions. Consulting with a vascular surgeon about individual risks can help create a proactive and personalized approach for better heart and vascular health."

For more information about vascular health and treatments, visit <https://vascular.org/patient-resources>

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