

HEALTHY BODY/HEALTHY MIND

Women suffer heart diseases, too

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RICHMOND, Ind. — Carol Pentecost was surprised by chest pain one night last year. She was even more surprised to learn what caused it.

"I woke up at 3 a.m. and felt this pain in my chest," said Ms. Pentecost, 33. "It was a heavy uncomfortable feeling, and somehow I knew I was having a heart attack."

She was surprised because, like many people, she thought heart disease was a concern for men, not her. But the American Heart Association says heart disease kills more women each year than all cancers combined.

"As a woman, you don't expect that you will suffer from heart disease. I thought it was something (a middle-aged) man would have to worry about, not a 30-something woman," she said.

Two weeks before suffering the attack, Ms. Pentecost visited her doctor. Though she had other health problems, the doctor did not consider them likely signs of a heart attack.

"My blood pressure was high and they placed me on medication. We figured out that my grandfather suffered from

a heart attack, but no one else in my immediate family suffers from heart disease."

For many years, a woman's biggest fear was breast cancer, said Dr. Edward Harlamert, an Indianapolis cardiologist. Men were generally diagnosed with heart disease at a younger age, he said. But researchers began to realize that heart disease can be just as much a risk for women.

"When a woman reaches menopause, the risk of her developing heart disease increases," Harlamert said. "Younger women are protected by estrogen. Research has shown that (estrogen) helps to keep their cholesterol levels low."

After menopause, a woman's risk of a heart attack nearly reaches that of a man's in about 10 years, according to the American Heart Association.

"More women are realizing that they are no longer immune," said Electa Berk, cardiac rehabilitation nurse at Reid Hospital & Health Care Services.

Women's symptoms are not the same as men's, and often they do not realize they are

having problems until after they are diagnosed, she said.

"When they do show up, they are usually sicker than men. It's the older age and many suffer from other diseases. What has changed is that



more doctors are now looking more closely at women who complain about chest pains," Ms. Berk said.

"When you hear some men talk about it, they remember suffering from sharp pain in their chest," she said. "By

speaking to other women who have the same problem, our experiences are much different."

Harlamert said genetics and smoking are the two largest contributors to younger women developing heart disease.

Smoking is the greatest avoidable cause of death for women, and it is the biggest risk factor for a heart attack, he said.

Cigarettes place added strain on the heart because smoking causes the blood vessels to constrict. If blood vessels have been narrowed and damaged by heart disease, smoking

only worsens the situation, he said.

"It is very rare that I see women under the age of 40 with heart disease who are non-smokers," Harlamert said. "Well over 90 percent of women I see with (heart disease) are smokers."

Tips for avoiding holiday headaches

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — For headache sufferers, any change in eating habits, environment, and routine can increase the frequency of headaches. When these changes all occur at the same time, as they do during the holiday season, headaches can happen more frequently and with greater intensity.

So here are some tips to help you conquer and avoid holiday headaches:

•The best advice for headache sufferers tempted by an overabundance of food and drink is: don't overindulge.

•Chocolate, sweets, and alcohol (especially red wine, fancy liqueurs, or aged alcohol) are known to trigger headaches in migraine sufferers. So if you have an egg nog and a few extra desserts at holiday time, you may find yourself with a migraine.

•If you drink too much, eat something high in fructose (sugar found in fruit and honey) to help your body burn off the alcohol more quickly.

•Standard fare at holiday parties — hot dogs, lunch meats, pepperoni, corned beef, smoked fish, and cured hams — have high levels of nitrites, which have also been linked to headache.

•Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is a known headache trigger. It is found in Chinese foods as well as certain instant foods, such as canned soup and frozen dinners.

•If you're too busy to eat, you may also have an increase in headache, as lowered blood sugar may cause blood vessels to dilate.

•Sleeping in, or changing time zones and not giving yourself a day or two to adjust, can alter the body's circadian rhythm and bring on headaches. Get up at the same time each day, even after late-

night parties.

•Caffeine withdrawal commonly causes headaches. For coffee drinkers, sleeping late during holiday vacation causes twice the problem: too much sleep and that first cup of coffee coming later than usual.

•After attending a matinee movie, spend a few minutes in the lobby to give your eyes time to adjust from the darkness of the theater to bright daylight. Bright light and glare trigger migraine headaches. Bring sunglasses.

•Get a carbon monoxide detector. Low levels of carbon monoxide from faulty heaters or other sources can cause headaches.

•Turn down the volume. Whether it's music, family parties, parades, or sporting events, loud noise is a common headache trigger.

Headache sufferers often find themselves in a minefield of headache triggers during

the holidays. You want to enjoy the time off and the good food, but it's important to enjoy them gradually and in moderation.

An estimated 40 million Americans suffer from chronic headaches. But only 5 to 7 percent of those headache sufferers seek medical help. Most people think they have to suffer without relief, or they don't think going to a doctor will do any good. The fact is, 90 percent of all people with headaches find some degree of relief if they see a doctor.

Florida midwife overcomes obstacles

By Bill Kaczor
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FLOWERSVIEW, Fla. — Gladys Milton, one of Florida's few remaining "granny midwives," traces her interest in delivering babies to childhood curiosity about "the birds and the bees and all that stuff."

Along the way, she has overcome the grief of losing two of her seven children to a drunken driver, fires that twice destroyed her birthing center and state bureaucrats who tried to put her out of business.

As an 8-year-old she thought the answer to where babies really came from had to be in the True Stories magazines that her aunt, a midwife, wouldn't let her read.

"I wanted to know about this baby business," recalled Milton, now 72. "The only way I could do that was to read her books while she went fishing, which means I sacrificed my fishing trip."

It was a big sacrifice, too, she said, because the only thing she liked more than fishing once was fishing twice.

"I look back to then as the beginning point," she said, though she did not start practicing midwifery until she was 35.

After delivering more than 2,000 babies, Gov. Lawton Chiles inducted her into the

Florida Women's Hall of Fame two years ago. She is regarded "with utmost reverence and awe," said Beth Swisher, legislative liaison for the Midwives Association of Florida.

Milton still maintains her certification primarily to serve as a backup to her youngest daughter at the Milton Memorial Birthing Center connected to the rear of her home.

Maria Milton is carrying on her mother's legacy in this tiny Panhandle community nestled among pine forests and fields of cotton and peanuts near the Florida-Alabama state line about 20 miles northeast of Crestview.

Patients come from throughout Walton and neighboring Okaloosa counties in Florida and Covington County, Ala. Many come, as they always have, because hospitals are too far away or too expensive.

But an increasing number are coming even though they have hospitals nearby or health insurance to pay the bills. Many want natural births, free of drugs to numb pain or induce delivery, and some are afraid of unnecessary Caesarean sections.

Karen Smith drove about an hour from her Santa Rosa Beach home for a prenatal exam and plans to use the birthing center for her second child, due

in February. Her first baby, 11-month-old Jerod, was born in a hospital.

"I just had a real bad experience," Smith said. The doctor arrived late, leaving the delivery to an inexperienced nurse, and then her husband was not allowed to spend the night with her, she said. Smith finds the birthing center more comfortable.

"I just feel the treatment's a lot more personal," she said. "And you have a lot more say in the way you want the baby to be delivered."

Milton herself had questioned the need for midwives when public health officials recruited her in 1958. But her oldest son, Henry, then a high school senior, encouraged her. He is now Dr. Tariq Abdullah, a physician.

After a year of training under doctors in nearby Florida, Ala., she was licensed and spent the next 17 years traveling from home to home delivering babies, often in squalid circumstances.

To help support her large family she also worked days as a housekeeper for Niceville artist Emil Holzhauser and his wife, Marion, and nights as a licensed practical nurse at hospitals in Florida and Opp, Ala. Her husband, Huey Milton, who died in

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